

Chairs Update May

The Parish Climate Change conference took place on 13th May 2008. We had some 50 or more parish councilors attend. The papers and other reports are on a special section of the website. I think we can say that there was considerable interest, and the workshop sessions showed that there are many questions and areas of potential action by parish residents, which could be tackled by the community. The RAF Steering Group will now consider the way forward, and how we find partners with funding to make progress. Further Forum views are most welcome.

One of the other concerns of our region, the upland sustainable economy, is beginning to coalesce around a Commission. You will remember the YHRAF wrote to Ministers in November last year when Foot and Mouth was ravaging the economy to suggest that the many strands of activity were brought together. I have been progressing this with my two RAF colleagues in North West and North East, Jack Ellerby of NW has been taking the lead, Richard Ellison our NFU Steering Group colleague has also been talking to Yorkshire Forward. We have also been taking an interest in the work at Leeds University on carbon sequestration and its possible importance in the City Region debate.

In parallel the Rural Advocate (CRC) has been corresponding with the Prime Minister. The result is a Commission of inquiry led by the CRC. The draft terms are “To assess and identify drivers of change in the hill and upland communities of England and to promote realistic strategies and policy recommendations that enable and equip those who live and work in these communities to move toward a more secure, economically prosperous and sustainable future”. I have mentioned it in full because it is a total study not just about one sector.

The first meeting of the Northern RAF’s initiative takes place next week and we will, of course, now fully integrate our activities with and support the CRC work. The Rural Advocate will also be starting his work in the Helmsley district next week and together with others I will be discussing issues with him.

There are many stresses on the Uplands, but it may be that the communities are best able to solve these themselves. It is very important therefore the RAF, with its fundamental remit to represent rural “customers” should try very hard to work from bottom up in this Commission work. Your views are very welcome and indeed very much needed if we are to fulfill our remit for our upland residents

Finally the DEFRA Select Committee has restarted its investigation into Sustainable Rural Communities. This committee basically sees how DEFRA is fulfilling its remit particularly the DEFRA Departmental Strategic Objective (DSO) which lays out the policy and delivery mechanisms. This is now also about “mainstreaming” and thus how DEFRA are ensuring that the many other Government Depts. are delivering services like Housing, Health, Policing, Education etc to Rural Communities. I have created a special section on the website to brief members on this very important scrutiny of the new arrangements.