

Chairman's Update December 2009

As this is my last update I think I should do some thanks. Firstly to all Forum members for their continuing support, the steering Group for their inputs and guidance, and finally to Carol at Askham Bryan and Mike Feist (and Anna before him) for keeping things going. We also need to thank Tim Frenneaux for his guidance and for persuading Yorkshire Forward that maybe a little monies would help for our future. To Michael at Fenweb for tolerating my amateur instructions and keeping the website going.

Although political uncertainty still abounds we are well advanced on plans to maintain a voice at all levels of Government delivery to rural, not only to contribute expertise but also to rural proof the mainstreamed delivery approach.

I am sure we all welcome Helen Wright as the new RAF Executive Manager, and her East Riding Colleagues will also do the administration. I believe Helen's expertise and great commitment to rural is a major gain for us. We certainly attracted some very high level applications and I thank them also for showing their support for RAF. I am sure they will help Helen in her new task of further strengthening our partnerships.

Systems require us to have an Accountable Body to do the accounts and I am very pleased that FERA are doing this for the RAF. Connections with FERA will help no end in having some high level science backing for rural thinking. Joanne Baker is the name in the frame, and she has already taken firm decisions in the secretariat appointment process plus all the boring contractual stuff. Joanne and Helen will be working closely together and we can reasonably say we are now more distanced from Government Office and getting quite independent.

Finally the appointment of a new chair. We have four very strong candidates. Immediately we have the new chair we will start the process of establishing the new [Management Group](#) and populate the structure with real names. This will hopefully be completed by the end of January.

It sounds as if all we have done is process, but I assure you that to reform the RAF and to get it fit for purpose the regional rural voice has also ensured that regional governance is aware we mean business.

The next two/three year period will be in my view dominated by how we cope with the economic squeeze, particularly in public funding and indeed public contribution to our region. We must remember some 35% of employment in the region is with the public sector. For our farming sector there is further reform of the CAP and this is some 60% of income help to our upland farmers and 30% or more to our lowland men; so its reform will affect our region's land management in a big way. The last reform is still being felt in the Uplands and the tensions between food and nature are being played out in the various enquiries into the 30% of our region that are in this upland sector. It will be a great loss if all the consultation work over past twelve months, trying to produce an upland strategy, is lost in the election process. Similarly the housing issues. I have posted on the website the [Government response to Taylor](#) but there is much to do and we are back to funds, both public and private. The whole issue of Government service delivery and equitable access by the spatially separated (distance) will be a major challenge with capped funding. We know it is more expensive and needs people, and Government bean counters measure people.

Overlay this with climate change and food security. Flooding issues are a major concern for the region on the downside of climate change, but on the upside land productivity and range of cropping will increase. I am very concerned that the visions of 2050 which are fluttering down from many single interest groups are forecasts from today's steady state, rather than scenarios of the climate and what its known influence will have caused by 2050. What do the uplands of Spain look like? That might be a better start point to decide whether there are sheep or cows or peat? What about fruit and vegetables? Will the garden of England move from Kent to

Yorkshire? I suspect it will. Are we planning a food infrastructure and delivery system that has no lorries running on diesel? So much more regional rather than unaffordable global journeys (never mind the carbon target arguments).

It will be your challenge as rural partners to ensure your various different views and interests are settled within rural and presented as one rural voice for inclusion in national, regional, and local governance, or 'they' will divide and rule and urban priorities will dominate.

A happy Christmas, best wishes for the New Year and the Rural Future of Yorkshire and Humber.
Thanks for having me.

Graham Ward