

Chair's Update

Graham Ward OBE

Chairman's update: February 2009

It is difficult to get away from the depression. Fortunately one sector of rural economy, namely farming, is by its structure less vulnerable to precipitous shifts. Because of land ownership and well documented CAP support the banks are more confident of their loans so are exerting less pressure. The loss of value of the pound also helps exports and increases price of imported food. However, the same can not be said of the food processing part of the supply chain, where quite large closures and redundancies have already occurred in our region, unfortunately in places like Malton, Grimsby and Hull where employment is already stressed. The linkage between rural and urban and the complex modern food supply chains will affect us all as the depression bites deeper.

At our Forum last week we had Helen West CEO of Business Link to talk about how Government support policies were being channeled to the rural economy. Her talk will be put on the website. Business support for all rural business including farming is now channeled via this one mainstreamed route. I know it difficult as first contact is preferably via their website but there are an increasing number of local centres being established for more personal contact. We will try to list these on our website. I have linked to a rather novel [underground map](#) approach, to finding the bits you may need.

There are a deluge of Government initiatives announced almost daily. Unfortunately the bureaucratic process cannot keep up, so much of this is still stuck, and real help on the ground is difficult to actually pin down. I feel for Business Link who seem to be the conduit for much of this, on top of the vast changes with which they are already struggling. Helen accepted they were just about getting the changes sorted but agreed the new burdens were challenging. Code for chaos.

RAF time is still dominated by the Sub National Review and how the rural voice can be maintained and if possible strengthened in these new structures. You may be a little bored by this, but rural is 20% of the regional population and we live in 80% of the land area. Our economic prosperity and our rural landscapes and smaller settlements must be fully and equitably represented in regional and Government strategies and deliveries. All RAF members must I believe work hard over next six months to ensure "we" have a place of influence at the tables of decision and power.

To this end we will hopefully together with the Regional Practitioners Group present a new document for agreement of the Rural Board to put the necessary strategic documents in place. We did do a bit of democracy at last Forum to spread the load of the Steering Group. We will be circulating final draft soon to all members and welcome your comments. Remember we are trying to make a case for why rural needs to INFLUENCE in ten pages of text with pictures.

Finally we are working closely with the National Empowerment Partnership to help their efforts to raise interest in grass roots emancipation. The Power to the people agenda. It may be your last chance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Graham King". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.