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Our Ref: GW/jj

Dear

As Chair of the Yorkshire and the Humber Rural Affairs Forum I am writing to you as Chair of your Local Strategic Partnership to explore how we might work together to ensure that rural areas receive equitable consideration in terms of policy and service delivery.

I should begin by explaining that the Rural Affairs Forum is part of the Rural Framework structures set up to assist in implementing government aims as set out in the Rural White Paper and Defra's Rural Strategy and Lord Haskins' report on modernising rural delivery. The Forum's particular remit is to try to represent the interests of rural 'customers', ie those on the receiving end of policies and service delivery, and to explore how any problems they experience might be overcome. More information on this is on our website ([www.yhraf.org.uk](http://www.yhraf.org.uk)), which together with our bi-monthly publication, Rural Matters, is our main means of communicating our activities.

Two issues are of particular interest to us at present. Firstly, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has emphasized that the needs of rural areas should be tackled through mainstream delivery rather than specific programmes. Secondly, as you are well aware, the introduction of the Sub National Review (SNR) is bringing new structures and ways of working into the regional governance structures. The latest consultation from Government, "Prosperous Places - Taking Forward the SNR" suggests in its very last paragraph the inclusion of rural representatives to take into account the needs of the rural economy.

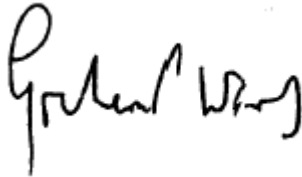
The RAF is considering how our role fits alongside this and how rural issues are embedded into the new 'mainstreamed' procedures at sub-regional, regional and Government levels. We are very much aware of the differing levels of rural activity in the various local authorities and, therefore, the probable different emphasis being applied to the LSP/LAA process that is taking place at the moment. In our view, whatever the level or area of rural interest within a local authority, rural issues should be assessed and evaluated on an ongoing basis if mainstreaming is properly applied.

We do recognize the difficulties presented by scattered rural populations and problems of accessibility and service provisions but we are keen to learn how we might help address them and to represent regional concerns and initiatives to Ministers where necessary via our quarterly national meeting of Chairs. We would welcome points of contact within your LSP membership - an elected councillor and a council staff professional - who would be acting as your rural lead. We can then circulate Rural Matters to them and also keep them informed of our wider activity.

Ideally we would like them to become Forum members so they receive other correspondence and can contribute to our activity.

I hope you can help us with this partnership approach and, if you agree, I would welcome contact details of your rural leads.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Ward'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Graham Ward OBE  
YHRAF Chair