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6<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Dear Sirs

### **Government's Draft Legislative Programme 2008/09**

The Yorkshire and Humber Rural Affairs Forum (YHRAF) welcomes the opportunity to view and comment on the Government's proposed legislative programme, 2008/2009. The Rt Hon Rosie Winterton, our Regional Minister, recently addressed a YHRAF meeting on this consultation and, as YHRAF Chair I attended an interactive session in Leeds which she also led. Whilst it is understood this consultation is part of a continuing process, it does allow a wider comment on the immediate policy issues.

I should start by explaining that the YHRAF is an independent regional body tasked with representing the regional rural voice at the regional level and, at the national level to Defra, our sponsoring government department, and Ministers.

Our main concern is that future as well as existing government policy is "rural proofed" by all government departments. Defra can elaborate on what this means in practice but the aim is to ensure equitable delivery of services by government and other public authorities to the smaller and dispersed twenty percent of the population that live in rural areas. This may not be so much a question of the legislation in itself as the way in which it is implemented all the way down to individuals on the ground. I have set out some specific examples from the consultation themes below.

**Economic Stability** A topical concern is encouraging low income saver accounts. The number of access points to such facilities may be a problem as many villages have lost most service points, eg Post Offices. Thought should be given to involving a wide range of providers like church groups not just banks /other official bodies

**Personalized and Improved public services** The problems of affordable housing and indeed provision of small sites in rural areas is well documented. The report by Matthew Taylor MP initiated by the Prime Minister gives an up-to-date documentation of these issues. YHRAF would ask that your housing policies take account of this report. In addition, setting out standards for public service that rural as opposed to urban residents should expect, equivalent to those recently outlined by government for access to post offices, would be helpful.

**Education** There is pressure to amalgamate rural schools. This is driven at local authority level. We would ask that the criteria required by central government are strengthened to ensure that economics do not drive the educational priorities.

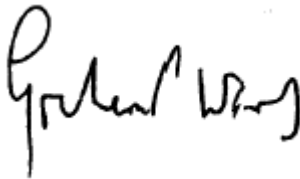
**Policing** Neighbourhood policing is working well but significantly more information is required to help inform the public on how the system works and how to access.

**Health** Centralization of services can limit access to rural residents poorly served by public transport. It should be a requirement in implementing legislative proposals that adequate access for rural residents is a part of the process.

**Handing Power Back to the People** We are taking part in separate consultation exercises on 'empowerment'. The essence of empowerment is trust and responsibility. Rural communities have for many centuries sought to ensure their sustainability. We have a Parish Council structure which needs empowering with more financial delegation and a proper input into local (sub-regional) governance. The present bill will need to considerably strengthen devolution of responsibility if it is to be credible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this new and welcome approach to legislative programming.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Ward'.

Graham Ward OBE

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