

Maximising the Rural Potential in Yorkshire & The Humber

Chairman's Preface

No-one would dispute that the countryside is a major asset to the Yorkshire and Humber region and is a key part of the image that it presents to the rest of the world. Shaped by generations, its diversity and attractiveness to resident and visitor alike provides a green contrast to our towns and cities as well as its all-important role in providing food and water and other necessities for our well-being.

Because these qualities are all too obvious, there is a danger that the need to sustain them together with the wellbeing of communities which contribute so much to local character and diversity, can be taken for granted. Planning is often urban-focussed and the particular needs of rural areas can be overlooked when decisions on service delivery, investment and resources are taken. This danger exists at all levels of decision-making, from national and regional policy down to implementation at the grassroots.

Our countryside has always changed in response to changing demands and circumstances but the impact of climate change is just one reason why we should ensure that we plan positively to address change and the problems and opportunities that rural areas present. Change as ever provides challenges to everyone. The sustainable future of the region is intrinsically linked to a sustainable future for its rural areas - and vice versa.

This document sets out how the sustainability challenges for the rural areas of Yorkshire and the Humber might best be approached. Prepared by the regional Rural Affairs Forum, it represents the views of a wide cross-section of those who live and work in, and enjoy the rural parts of the region. It seeks to draw the attention of those taking decisions to key points about rural areas, the benefits they provide and what is needed both to maximize these benefits and to ensure those living and working there are not disadvantaged in terms of service delivery.

The Rural Affairs Forum exists to support all those with responsibilities to tackle the challenges and opportunities of *Rural Yorkshire and the Humber*. I very much hope all those responsible for decision-making at different levels will find this document helpful in meeting these challenges.

Graham Ward

Chair, Rural Affairs Forum for Yorkshire and the Humber

Maximising the Rural Potential in Yorkshire & The Humber

1. Introduction

1.1 The Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Framework was prepared by regional partners and launched in 2006 in response to the Government's Rural Strategy 2004 and Lord Haskins Review of Rural Delivery. Its aim was to improve governance and delivery structures and make best use of available resources in order to achieve a 'vibrant and sustainable future for rural Yorkshire and the Humber'. This aim remains but there have since been significant changes in the context in which the Framework operates - the growing importance of the Climate Change agenda; the Sub- National Economic Development and Regeneration Review (HM Treasury) and its related structures and responsibilities; the City Region approach; the new style of Local Area Agreements; the Government's promotion of community empowerment and its emphasis that rural issues must be properly addressed through mainstream delivery.

1.2. These changes have prompted a review of the Framework. Drawing on experience to date with the existing Framework, the partnership of rural interests in the region represented by the Rural Affairs Forum have concluded that a document is required that better highlights the contribution that rural areas make to the region and how, with changing circumstances, this contribution can best be safeguarded and enhanced by those taking decisions affecting these areas.

1.3. This document starts by summarising some key points about *Rural Yorkshire and The Humber*, its contribution to the region, and problems particular to, or exacerbated by rural circumstances. This is then followed by a statement of the principles that should underpin strategies, plans and decision-making. The final section looks at how progress in achieving the overall aim of the Rural Framework can be monitored at all levels.

2. Rural Yorkshire and The Humber - Context

2.1. At 15,512 sq km, the Yorkshire and Humber region accounts for nearly 12% of England's land mass. It is home to 5 million people, 80% of which live in urban areas of 10,000 population or more. The remaining 20% - just under a million people - live in the 87% of the region's land area that is classed as rural, this population being spread across some 1350 settlements ranging from small towns to hamlets. The rural population has increased by 11.8% over the last 25 years whereas in urban areas it has decreased by 1.2%.

2.2. While the northern and eastern parts of the Yorkshire and Humber region are clearly more rural in nature, all local authorities with the exception of Hull, contain rural areas. Of the seven metropolitan authorities in the region, the rural areas of four authorities (Bradford, Kirklees, Wakefield and Rotherham) contain at least 10% of their total population. The region's rural population is distributed among the 'city regions' as follows: Leeds – 47%; Hull and Humber

Ports – 25%; Sheffield – 9%. The remaining 19% live in the four northern districts of North Yorkshire outside of these city regions.

2.3. Geographically the region is very diverse, displaying a variety of landscape character from upland moors to dale, vale and coast within which major densely populated cities and conurbations contrast with remote villages and scattered farmsteads. The quality as well as the diversity of the region's environment is reflected in the fact that just over 29% of its total land area is designated as being of national scenic, environmental and historical importance. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the rural areas in terms of area (71%), with the region supporting over 11% of England's agricultural holdings. Woodland covers some 50,000 hectares (5.8% of the total land area).

3. The Rural Contribution

3.1. To most people, especially those living in urban areas, any mention of the region's countryside will probably conjure up images of a mainly farmed landscape which encompasses a wide range of scenic and other attractions that provide enjoyment and recreation for day-trippers, tourists and ramblers alike. While clearly important, this 'traditional' view of the countryside only scratches the surface of the wider contribution that Yorkshire and the Humber's rural areas make to the region's economy and the well being of its people.

3.2. For example, the rural areas play a major role in terms of food production and food security, both inland and offshore. Their rivers and reservoirs supply much of the region's fresh water and mineral resources as well as hosting water and waste treatment plants and flood management systems. The region's main energy generators and transmission network and major infrastructure - airports, strategic rail and road transport routes and defence establishments - are all located within, or traverse rural areas.

3.3. Economic activity in rural areas is a fundamental part of the region's economy and contributes directly to its competitiveness. There is little difference between much of the economic activity taking place in rural and urban parts of the region. Output per head from economic activity in rural areas tends to be lower than urban areas, but some rural districts (i.e. Selby, Craven and North Lincolnshire) are as productive¹ as many of the region's major urban districts. The 2008 UK Competitiveness Index² found that of the region's ten most competitive districts, five were rural (Hambleton, Craven, Ryedale, Selby, East Riding of Yorkshire).

3.4. In economic terms, the value of the region's countryside cannot be underestimated. It is a key part of the region's promotional 'brand' as a tourist destination - attracting millions of visitors from home and overseas - and as an attractive place in which to work, set up businesses and invest. It underpins the promotion of a range of regional food and other products.

¹ £ output per full time equivalent worker

² UK Competitiveness Index 2008, Huggins and Izushi, UWIC

3.5, The countryside is also a major asset for wellbeing. For those living in the region, the 'broad acres' or the 'countryside on the doorstep' provides respite from the pressures of urban life. The wide diversity of the region's countryside, its mix of distinctive towns and villages, its wealth of historic features are all valued regionally by the urban majority as places within which to relax, explore and be active.

3.6. Looking to the future, it is evident that the rural areas and communities of Yorkshire and the Humber will play a key role in delivering a low carbon region by:

- providing the raw materials and sites for the generation of renewable energy from wind and water, ethanol and biomass, and potentially for carbon sequestration;
- deliver food security whilst ensuring the protection of the region's natural resources; and
- providing high quality water supplies and improved bio-diversity through sensitive management of land and forests.

3.7. The rural areas are also well placed to play an increasing role in two other respects. First, they already host higher numbers of businesses per head of population, have higher rates of employment and higher skilled residents,³ providing a good basis for further growth. Secondly, many rural communities have considerable experience of community-led planning, in setting out aspirations for their localities and in working alongside the statutory sector to implement plans and projects. Urban and suburban neighbourhoods may well be able to benefit from this experience.

3.8. The contribution of the region's countryside is thus clearly more than a backdrop to its towns and cities. Town and country have complementary roles and attributes; each is dependant on the other and this interdependence must be a key factor in planning for the future.

4. The Rural Challenge

4.1. Maximising the contribution that both town and country can make to the region as a whole needs to take account of their different circumstances. There is little distinction between urban and rural lifestyles or many aspects of economic and social activity – people have similar needs and aspirations wherever they live. However, there are some key differences in circumstances, even when making allowances for the diversity in both town and country.

4.2. In general, the evidence shows that the region's rural areas are doing well relative to urban and mixed areas on a number of indicators. In addition to the economic factors mentioned above, rural residents generally have

³ A Rural Evidence Base for Yorkshire and the Humber 2006 & 2008, YH Rural Observatory

higher average household incomes, are more likely to be older but are healthier and live longer, participate more often in sports and physical activities, and generally enjoy a higher quality physical environment. Rural areas suffer from lower levels of crime and suffer less overall from the deprivation existing in many urban areas. Rural residents are generally positive about their quality of life, local environment and their ability to influence decisions. Through being relatively small and clearly defined by the surrounding countryside, rural communities have a sense of place and identity that fosters community spirit and, of necessity, a tradition of self-reliance. This in turn has encouraged local initiatives and there are already many good examples within the region of community action in rural areas to get things done, ranging from tackling local affordable housing needs, to community transport and social enterprises..

4.3. However, these favourable indicators need to be seen in context. They are generalizations - circumstances vary widely both for rural communities and, of course, for individuals within them. Living in small communities scattered over a wide area has its problems. Put simply, rural residents have more limited choices, more restricted job opportunities and incur higher costs than their urban counterparts in accessing services and facilities.

4.4. Wages are consistently lower in rural areas than in urban and mixed areas, where opportunities for economic activity and employment are more apparent and diverse. Whilst average household incomes are generally higher than in urban areas, measured at the place of work, the region's most rural areas have the lowest average earnings (£16,900) compared with £18,600 in major urban areas. A higher proportion of the rural workforce relies on part-time or seasonal employment and this applies to 'accessible' as well as 'remote' rural areas. There is often a significant gap in household incomes between those relying on local earnings and those travelling to work beyond the local economy.

4.5. The most obvious limitation for rural residents and businesses is accessing services and facilities that those living in urban areas take for granted. For residents, shops, post offices, garages and pubs are far fewer and have decreased markedly in recent decades. The limited provision of bus and rail services means greater reliance on private transport to access employment, education, shops, services and entertainment, a particular problem for those without access to a car. For businesses, difficulties in access to business support services, training, and suppliers can place them at a competitive disadvantage to their urban counterparts. The costs of delivery to a dispersed population means that the standards applying to both public and private sector service provision are often significantly reduced or are not available, e.g. fast Broadband connections, mains gas, health and social support services

4.6. The greater reliance on cars as a means of transport and the distances that many people in rural areas need to travel to get to work, college, hospitals or dentists for example, means greater expenditure on fuel, the cost

of which is already much higher in most rural petrol stations. And the lack of mains gas services increases reliance on more expensive means of heating, e.g. fuel oil. This in turn means that rising fuel prices tend to have a disproportionate impact on rural residents and businesses. For many rural businesses, road transport is often the only viable means of linking them to suppliers, markets and customers. Again, poor rural road infrastructure and the distances to be travelled can leave rural businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

4.7 These factors result in those living and working in rural areas generally having a higher carbon footprint. This has been used to justify resisting rural development on the grounds that it would exacerbate car usage, traffic generally and hence vehicular emissions. While it is clearly desirable to explore how the need for individual car usage can be reduced, rural areas do need development if communities are to be socially and economically sustainable. The key criterion is that development should be of a scale, type and design that is appropriate to its location and contributes to meeting local needs.

4.8. The other main problem of choice facing rural residents is that of housing affordability, which is significantly worse in rural than urban parts of the region. The main reasons are increasing numbers of people wishing to live in rural areas coupled with an insufficient supply to cope with demand. The region's rural population is increasing by an average of over 10,000 people per year, this increase being at a higher rate than in urban areas. The pressures are most felt in rural areas within commuting distance of the main towns and cities but attractive and remoter areas have also been affected by demand for second and holiday homes. Problems of housing affordability are, of course, not confined to rural areas but those on lower incomes have a much reduced choice than their urban counterparts in finding places to live near their work and families. On average, the house price to wage ratio in the region's most rural areas is 8.95 compared with 6.41 for the major urban areas. And the provision of affordable rented housing is lower in rural areas – 11% of the rural housing stock compared with 21% of the housing stock in urban areas. The 'double whammy' of higher housing costs and lower earning capacity is already causing 'reverse commuting' from town to countryside by those who cannot afford to live near their work; some of whom are seen as 'key workers' e.g. teachers. It also means that the social composition of some village communities will be determined more by income than any other consideration.

4.9. Finally, the generally favourable picture for rural areas painted by some indicators should not disguise current concerns about rural poverty or the implications of the age imbalance in the rural population generally. Unemployment, poverty and deprivation can be found across all rural areas, particularly in the upland, coalfield and coastal parts of the region but too often they are scattered and limited in scale, making them hard to see when compared to more densely populated places. The Commission for Rural Communities [CRC] estimates that 15% of the most deprived people in the country are rural residents but this is rarely reflected in the official Index of

Multiple Deprivation [IMD], which is geared to concentrated rather than dispersed problems; some rural communities in the former Yorkshire coalfield areas qualify on this score. The CRC figure suggests rural poverty applies to around 150,000 people in Yorkshire and the Humber. As regards the age imbalance, the evidence shows a continued rise in the percentage of over 60s and a continued decline in 16-24 year age group. An ageing population affects the vitality and sustainability of small communities as well as bringing new pressures on services through, for example, community care provision for the elderly and viability of rural schools.

4.10. Maximising the potential and, in turn, the social, economic and environmental well-being of rural areas of Yorkshire and the Humber will only be achieved if the above issues are addressed. With improved collaborative working and targeted support either to 'place' or to personal circumstances as appropriate, this can be done.

5. Realising the vision for rural areas.

5.1. The starting point for any principles for rural or urban areas remains those set out in the UK's Sustainable Development Strategy⁴, namely that a sustainable future means:

- Living within environmental limits
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Using sound science responsibly
- Promoting good governance

5.2. Achieving sustainable rural areas will ultimately depend on how the principles are interpreted and implemented across different areas of the region, and how well specific actions and policy can balance local conditions, issues and wider concerns. The objectives of rural stakeholders in Yorkshire and the Humber are to ensure that the sustainable future sought by 'Growing Together' – the region's integrated strategy – is delivered across the whole region and is shared by all 5 million residents. In this respect, rural interests do not seek to engage in any 'special pleadings', but rather proportionate and fair outcomes for rural communities, and the businesses, people and places that they support. This is important as rural communities are more vulnerable to shortfalls in service whether these arise from pressures to meet numerical targets (which are easier to achieve where populations are concentrated), or from pressures on the public purse due to the economic downturn.

5.3. Fair outcomes are more likely to be achieved if the following set of principles are considered and applied.

⁴ Securing the Future - The UK's Sustainable Development Strategy

- a. Progressive improvement in economic and social well being across rural areas should be a key outcome sought by all regional and local strategies.
- b. The diversity of rural areas within the region should be factored into strategies and policies, acknowledging the need for a flexible approach to economic development and service delivery that can take full account of local conditions and offer tangible local solutions.
- c. Urban-rural inter-relationships should be fully considered in the development of strategies. Policy proposals for those living and working in urban areas should address any implications for people in the rural hinterlands and vice versa.
- d. Planning and delivery of publicly-funded services in rural areas should strive to ensure that consumers experience equity in terms of access and outcomes comparable with those enjoyed by consumers in urban areas, and to maximise synergy between service providers wherever practicable.
- e. Policy making, service planning, delivery and performance management should be tailored to conditions at a level of geography that resonates with people and meaningfully involves them in the process at the local, neighbourhood level where impacts are most felt.

5.4. The Rural Framework 2006 sought to achieve a 'vibrant and sustainable future for rural Yorkshire and the Humber'. It explained that this should mean that *'rural Yorkshire and the Humber, and the communities within it, remains a place where all those who live, work, play and visit can thrive while maintaining and enhancing the natural environment.'* This remains the vision and rural stakeholders believe the key actions and interventions required to support the delivery of this vision comprise:

- Developing a range of employment opportunities which provide earning power within the locality comparable to that obtained through commuting further afield.
- Meeting the acute need for affordable housing in many communities and improving the availability, range and diversity of housing stock in rural areas.
- Conserving natural resources and linking environmental and cultural assets, e.g. landscapes and biodiversity, to economic opportunity, food security and climate change adaptation in ways that protect and enhance these assets,
- Enhancing access to services and facilities in a way that meets the needs of the consumer and reduces reliance on personal transport wherever possible.

6. Monitoring Progress

6.1. In recent years considerable progress has been made in developing the rural evidence base using the official rural/urban definition to inform targeting and baselines from which to measure progress at national, regional, sub-regional and local level. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has drawn on a range of national data as a means of measuring annual performance of its Departmental Strategic Objective (DSO) for Socially and Economically Sustainable Rural Communities. The Rural Observatory, part of Yorkshire Futures, has published an annual regional Rural Evidence Base report since 2005 and the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber has recently produced a regional version of Defra's DSO dataset - the 'Rural Barometer'. In addition, a range of regional bodies and organisations collect and analyse data relevant to rural policy and delivery. This along with data collected for State of the Region reports and for monitoring the new Integrated Regional Strategy will all help to provide a basis for 'rural proofing' and inform interventions where appropriate.

6.2. This activity will greatly enhance knowledge of how rural areas are performing. For many people, however, the crucial question is how well their rural areas fare in the context of administrative boundaries with which they are most familiar. In most cases this will be the local authority boundary. Local authorities are becoming more active in analysing data for their rural areas. This will help to inform the statutory function of their Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Comprehensive Area Assessments [CAA] prepared by the Audit Commission will also help rural interests better understand progress in addressing their concerns and implementing the government's community empowerment agenda at the local level.

Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum

4th June 2009