



## **Inquiry into the future of England's uplands communities**

### **Main messages from East Midlands regional hearing, 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Buxton, Derbyshire**

This report summarises the main messages arising from the CRC's fourth regional hearing in Buxton, Derbyshire on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009. It is intended to give a flavour of the breadth of issues and topics raised over the course of the two days, rather than provide a fully comprehensive record of all the views expressed. A full verbatim transcript of the formal inquiry hearings is available on request from the CRC Upland Inquiry team (see below).

**The views and experiences recorded in this report are those raised by participants in the inquiry session.** They are reported without comments and they are not necessarily shared by the CRC. This report will be used, together with reports from the five other regional hearings and other research by the CRC as part of this inquiry, to identify and to understand how upland communities function and develop and promote realistic policy recommendations to support a sustainable future. The full inquiry findings and recommendations will report its recommendations in the Autumn 2009.

For further details about the CRC's uplands inquiry, please contact the uplands inquiry team: at [uplandsinquiry@ruralcommunities.gov.uk](mailto:uplandsinquiry@ruralcommunities.gov.uk).

We are very grateful to individuals and representatives of the following organisations who kindly gave up their time to meet the inquiry panel and share their views and experiences:

Bakewell and Eyam Community Transport  
British Mountaineering Council  
Brown & Co Agricultural Business Consultancy  
Connexions, Derbyshire  
Connexions, Staffordshire  
Derby & Derbyshire Enterprise Partnership  
Derby Racial Equality Council  
Derbyshire Adult Community Education  
Derbyshire Constabulary  
Derbyshire County Youth Service  
Derbyshire Dales District Council  
Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council  
Derbyshire Rural Community Council  
East Midlands Federation of Small Businesses  
East Midlands Development Agency  
Friends of the Peak  
High Peak Borough Council  
High Peak Community Arts  
High Peak Council for Voluntary Services  
High Peak Inter Faith Issues  
Leek University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age  
Moors for the Future Partnership  
Peak District Farm Holiday Group  
Peak District Local Access Forum

Peak District National Park Authority  
Staff and pupils from Buxton Community High School  
Staff and pupils from Chapel-en-le-Frith High School  
Staffordshire County Council – Adult and Community Learning Service  
Staffordshire Moorlands Local Cultural Strategy  
Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Wolverhampton Local Access Forum  
Swizzels Matlow  
UK Bird Clearance Services  
Visit High Peak & Derbyshire

## **Main Inquiry Messages**

These have been grouped into the following 6 themes:

1. Communities
2. Economies
3. Public Goods and Benefits
4. Farming
5. Policy and Practices
6. Solutions

### **1. Communities**

**Cohesive communities:** The perception of upland communities as mono-cultural settlements was challenged with the assertion that there aren't any mono-cultural settlements. The upland communities are cohesive and tight knit. An example offered to contextualise this view related to Parish research which showed that in every parish in the uplands faith was more diverse than people may expect. The perception of a Christian-only society was not an accurate one – with further research looking at other faiths and their impact on communities.

**BME (Black Minority Ethnic) communities:** BME communities are very small in number in the upland areas and this was perceived, by some attending the hearings, to allow the needs of BME groups to be overlooked. A view was presented that for some BME groups a psychological barrier exists to visiting and living in the Peak District. It was suggested that BME groups would feel, or would be made to feel, unwelcome. With the focus of community work and funding being mainly urban focussed it was asserted that there is less spending on equality work in upland areas and therefore less recognition of this issue. However, there are some initiatives seeking to address these concerns. The MOSAIC Partnership was noted as an initiative to increase the involvement of people from BME communities in the Peak District. They aim to address a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity among service providers.

**'Hard to Reach' Groups:** There has been work hard to reach groups in the High Peak. For example, a Moorland Working Group was highlighted – this group has been set up for women on low incomes living in the uplands. Attendees also noted a community worker who was looking at mental health problems within the gypsy traveller community. Despite these initiatives, a significant view was voiced about the need for more rural proofing of Government policy e.g. DWP Welfare Reform Bill.

**Policing:** An assertion was made that upland communities have a fear of crime and in response Safer Neighbourhood Teams have been introduced to the High Peak area which will focus on local crime related issues. However, it was also highlighted that there is a significant gap between the fear of crime and actual incidents of crime. An initiative called Operation Moor Watch (a collaboration between Natural England and Association of Chief Police Officers) was noted and is due to be launched this year. Linked to this was the concern that there isn't enough funding available to engage with upland communities and support ongoing target and crime prevention work. As a result, there are issues around the sustainability of initiatives because partners' funding comes under scrutiny to demonstrate value for money.

**Higher Education:** The Buxton Campus of the University of Derby was noted as being very

important for the High Peak area. It has attracted young people to the area and allowed others to live at home and travel to university. The university provides a network of buses for students because the cost of travel can be prohibitive for young people to access further and high education.

**Adult Community Learning:** It was asserted that there has been a decline in adult learning in the High Peak area – with this assertion being linked to the increased cost of learning for the individual. It was suggested that adult learning is increasingly being moved back to urban centres making it hard for isolated communities in the uplands to access these services. Participants recognised that it is difficult for these services to respond when there are low numbers or individual learners to cater for. Training practitioners noted that a certain number of people are required to join or attend courses to justify running costs. Packages can be put together for individual learners but it is often expensive leading to a move back to adult learning centres (primarily based in urban or market town centres). Supporting this point, other participants noted that adult education in isolated areas has lost funding. As such, the costs of providing an equitable service provision is increasing especially when high travel costs are factored in.

Participants directed attention to Government policies which were felt to be disproportionately harder on people living in isolated areas. To contextualise these views, it was asserted that money is spent hitting targets first (rather than identified local needs) and that the funding system is based on an urban model and is too inflexible to extend its reach into the more remote rural areas. It doesn't take account of the additional costs for running services in isolated areas like the uplands. However outreach support is available and seen as a potential solution.

An example of a successful adult education initiative was provided. The University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age is a voluntary funded organisation open to people usually over 50 and retired. The organisation relies on volunteer teachers and voluntary funding. It is open to all and people often help each other e.g. by car sharing. The retired people attending the courses have described this service as being “better than bingo”.

**Young people's opinion on life in the uplands:** The young people at the hearing generally enjoyed living in the uplands. They liked the freedom and they knew everybody in the community and felt safe. However, some participants noted that young people could sometimes feel isolated. A lack of mobile and broadband coverage was suggested as being a key problem, particularly for children in isolated areas. Participants noted that it could be more difficult to do their homework (without access to broadband) and to socialise (given the poor mobile phone coverage). It can be difficult to take part in after school activities or to see friends because they relied on their parents to pick them up by car. There weren't any late buses and in general there is a lack of public transport to travel to college or for training. Pupils travelled to school by school bus or by a free taxi service. Youth Clubs and Youth Information Shop (offering advice and information after school) are located in town but weren't really used by children from the outlying villages. Parish councils should have more money to spend on youth clubs in villages. Young Farmers Clubs were well organised and popular with children from farms but non-farming children didn't really attend.

On a positive front, it was highlighted that children in the High Peak are achieving better results than regional and national statistics at every level.

**Community Transport:** A number of views noted that Community Transport in the uplands could be improved. Participants suggested that the various schemes need a better understanding of the whole community's transport requirements. For example, widening the times of the bus service so more people can use the service.

**Housing:** There was a widely held perception that a shortage of affordable housing was a big issue inside and outside of the National Park. It was felt that there were a number of key reasons for this. It was asserted that the majority of housing development takes place around existing towns – not in the uplands.

This view was equated to a perceived lack of land. Housing is seen as unaffordable due to high

demand and the low waged economy (many local employees being on minimum wage). The high demand for housing being perceived as coming from higher earners buying homes in the uplands from the adjacent urban areas of Manchester and Sheffield.

The issue of housing type was also a concern. A strong and growing demand for rented housing set alongside weaker supply was perceived to be increasing the difficulty of finding housing. It was also asserted that the gap between wages and house prices was now so great that even part ownership schemes are unaffordable to many on low wages. The Right to Buy Scheme was also considered as being a reason for the small and diminishing lack of social housing.

## **2. Economies**

**Transport:** Public transport availability for people to travel for work in upland areas was highlighted as a problem. Often bus times were irregular and inconvenient especially for shift workers or there wasn't a service at all. Employers felt the public transport was aimed at retired people; not the employed. A larger employer suggested that as many as 60% of the workforce lived in the uplands but only 25% used public transport with the majority driving to work.

Transport is a problem for small businesses based in the uplands and increasing costs of fuel make it difficult in terms of transporting goods.

Government cycling schemes were thought to be a good idea as long as safe bike routes could be guaranteed.

**Technology:** Broadband was described as being often non-existent in the uplands of the East Midlands. Isolated farms and properties often have no mobile or 3G coverage. Many homes and businesses relied on copper wire. Broadband speed was also emphasised as a key issue when placed alongside the broadband coverage that urban enjoy. Participants highlighted that if the upland's economy was going to be of a high value it should be able to compete on a level playing field – with better broadband coverage and speeds being equated helping upland businesses to achieve this.

**NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training):** Attendees suggested that school leavers at 16 found it difficult to find work in their local upland communities. It was noted that some upland businesses are currently working with schools to encourage young people to take up apprenticeships. However, an inhibiting factor to greater take up was the difficulty to travel for training and to use services, although outreach services were available.

**Apprenticeships:** Some concerns were noted that there is a low uptake of apprenticeships schemes by micro and SME businesses in the uplands. The reason being suggested related to smaller businesses not able to afford to pay for qualifications such as NVQs. It was suggested that apprenticeships play an important role in keeping young people in the uplands area. However in the tough economic climate even large employers are cutting the number of apprentices. In addition, the perceived low aspiration of school leavers was highlighted as a problem – many of whom it was suggested drop out of manufacturing apprenticeships before completing.

**Loss of young people:** A number of attendees noted that young people are leaving the uplands for higher paid jobs in the cities. The Peak district was described as being unique –given its position adjacent to major urban conurbations eg Sheffield and Manchester. A number of competing pressures were considered. Affordability of housing is a barrier; limited workspace and overly stringent planning mean that finding business or living accommodation is very difficult. High Peak offered one exception. Many young people have been attracted to this area because of the University of Derby and by the high skilled jobs on offer at Health and Safety Executive laboratories.

**Tourism:** Tourism was described positively and was seen as being able to provide jobs for

local people in the uplands. Holiday lets were described as popular in the Peak District area; camping was described as booming - especially during the tough economic times - where holidaying abroad was seen as too expensive. The key to running a successful holiday let was thought to be down to the fact that the Peak District could offer the consumer something different. Furthermore, business that had a good website, where people could make online bookings, were seen to foster success. This was not universally the case. Some smaller holiday lets, for example, were said to be struggling. In addition an oversupply of holiday cottages was described as potentially over-saturating the market.

**Business support services:** Businesses in the uplands were described as being often small, traditionally run family firms. Furthermore, the large number of SMEs in the uplands was thought to have great potential to develop. Barriers to this happening were described in relation the lack of locally accessible grants. Often small businesses, it was suggested, can make great achievements with small amounts of money. Linked to these observations a small number of participants suggested that businesses in the uplands felt some distrust of external support services. Instead, local upland businesses tended to seek support from within the community. One point of view, offered from an entrepreneur, suggested that the secret to the success for upland businesses was to find a niche in the market; have lots of assets and be prepared to diversify and adapt when markets open up. Ultimately, though, it was suggested that it is useful to be located in a place which is easily accessible.

**Planning restrictions:** Planning restrictions inside and outside the National Park were causing much frustration amongst the business community. A view was put forward that many people weren't taking planning applications forward because they thought they would be immediately refused permission. The nature and outcome of pre-planning application discussions, it was suggested, often mean that applicants do not progress to full application stage as a result. A more helpful planning service was deemed to be needed. And to this end, it was suggested that planners should act as facilitators helping people and businesses through the planning process.

### **3. Public goods and benefits**

**Proximity to urban conurbations:** A number of participants highlighted the unique nature of the uplands in East Midlands - describing them as a "backyard" for the urban conurbations who visit at weekends and Bank Holidays. Whilst this was described in terms of opportunities (eg. for business and tourism) and threats (eg. increased crime, environmental damage). But all agreed that urban visitors need to have a better understanding of their long term impact on the uplands. These views were offered in relation to the existing public goods and benefits that the uplands produce. Participants equated a better understanding of public goods and benefits as a means to better safeguarding their future.

In line with the views outlined above, participants noted what they felt were the Public Goods of the Uplands. These were drinking water, flood risk management and blanket bog areas for carbon storage were thought to be important public goods of the uplands. Landscape, tranquillity, biodiversity and visual quality are also important.

**Tourism:** The Peak District was said to have a high number of day visitors who tended to spend only small amounts of money in the area. As such, the National Park was said to have invested heavily in supporting new day visitor attractions with a view to encouraging visitors to spend more and stay longer. A further initiative was highlighted whereby local taxation on visitors e.g. pay to park in village was suggested. However, this was not a universally seen as a reliable means of raising revenue as it can lead to a decrease in visitor numbers. It was suggested that visitors are often willing to make a goodwill donation to help with conservation - but will vote with their feet if forced to contribute. Instead, the solution was seen more in terms of how and where the Government spends money in the upland communities.

A contrary view to investing in tourism was offered. Some participants asserted that food, renewable energy and water should be the future of the uplands income/revenue not tourism.

So while the National Park is aiming to increase the value of tourism not it should also be giving

equal attention to these wider income streams. To this end, the National Park was said to be using money from Defra to explore renewable energy in the park.

**Renewable energy:** A prevailing view seemed to indicate that communities' engagement with climate change doesn't appear to be on the Government's agenda and therefore communities needed to share best practice. Hydro power, anaerobic digestion and wind farms could be described as ways for farms to diversify into. But participants recognised a need for investment to be forthcoming in renewable energy schemes. Participants suggested that investment (from for example from the RDA) could offer positive and potentially large returns. But anchored to these views was the need to involve communities in renewable energy schemes. For example, community wind farms and other schemes should allow the community to receive direct benefits.

#### **4. Farming**

**Business Link and the farming sector:** It was suggested by some participants that the farming sector in the uplands of Derbyshire and Staffordshire often had an entrepreneurial flair. It was asserted that they do seek advice from Business Link on diversification and grants. A service that, participants suggested, Business Link could provide is a "translation of grant forms" service for farmers applying for grants understanding the market. A prevailing view suggested that there was too much red tape and bureaucracy around the grant application process. Businesses (of all types) and particularly farming felt the burden of regulation was disproportionate (particularly the environmental regulations).

The livestock sector in the uplands was thought to be fragile and failure would have a negative impact on other parts of the economy. It was felt that RDPE doesn't do enough to support existing farming and was more interested in diversification and adding value to the farm.

**Environment vs. farming:** The National Park was noted as being a driver in the development of environmental and conservation schemes. However, concerns were raised about the lack of farmers engaging with land management schemes. It was suggested that better communications between Government, conservation groups and farmers is required. It was also suggested that Agri-environmental schemes need local case officers who understand local issues and help improve relationships between the farming community and environmental organisations. Education, was said, to play an important role helping farmers understand environmental schemes but raising awareness in remote areas can be a problem.

Overwhelmingly, when asked what could help safeguard the future of farming in the uplands, the response directed attention toward relaxing planning restrictions so that more homes on family farms could be built. Participants noted that planning restrictions are often confusing for the general public even though planning guidance is available.

Participants also noted, however, that the local authority and national park are working together to provide affordable housing but they have differing standards for affordable housing. In addition attendees noted a desire to see more renewable energy, for example, wind farms and hydro power on the hills were suggested.

#### **5. Policy and practices – general points raised during the hearings**

**Regional Development Agencies:** East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) and Advantage West Midlands are working together to avoid geographical boundaries causing problems where people live on the border. EMDA are giving advice on local level spending and are willing to endorse local decision making but their hands are tied by legislation. Statutory instruments are needed and a change in the Regional Development Agencies Act to allow the delegation of funds and local decision making.

**Local authorities:** Local authorities, it was suggested, often lack resources to work on major

broadband projects even if money is available therefore small, isolated communities can miss out. There is a corporate pressure to balance job creation and regeneration in the whole of the authority with projects in small communities.

**National Park Authority:** There is a general perception and assumption that the National Park will say no to any new developments. The authority has sent up a pre-application service for the public to make the planning process more accessible. However, the National Park also runs an advisory service to help communities obtain grants and they also fund grants of their own. They have developed an accreditation scheme to connect producers and tourism providers with the aim to make the network self supporting and provide a marketing edge.

**Devolution to parish councils:** It was suggested that Parish councils often don't have the capacity to take on more powers. They have limited capacity to enable projects and don't have the resources so turn to local authorities for support and management. If parish councils are going to have more powers they need to have a good understanding and technical knowledge.

## **6. Solutions proposed by participants**

### **Communities:**

**BME communities:** Young BME people should be encouraged to be more involved in activities in the Peak District to break down the psychological barriers of feeling unwelcome.

**Adult Community Education:** Partnerships could be established with schools and adult education services. For example, in remote areas schools could have vocational learning centres attached with shared access for other schools and evening classes for adult learners.

**Housing:** Former offices could be converted into homes. Also houses could be sold to local authorities to provide affordable housing.

### **Economies:**

**Transport:** Upland businesses and public transport companies need to work together. If public transport times were made wider to help shift workers; companies could encourage employees to use services.

**Apprenticeships:** A skills broker with knowledge of the uplands area and businesses could work with an employer to develop bespoke learning and training for an apprentice.

**Incentivise graduates:** Young people and graduates should be encouraged, supported and incentivised to start up small businesses in upland areas.

### **Public goods and benefits:**

**Renewable energy:** Best practice examples of community renewable energy are needed to be shared with other communities.

### **Farming:**

**Collaboration:** Farmers should be encouraged to collaborate when buying and selling produce. Farming co-operatives could be set up to work with outside organisations e.g. marketing companies to market and sell local produce.

**Partnership working:** Local community partnerships need to be formed between conservation organisations and farming communities.