



CRC 14/07

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Rural Advocate and Rural Affairs Minister come to Norfolk

Stuart Burgess, the Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and the Government's Rural Advocate, is coming to Norfolk as part of a series of visits to talk with people who live and work in rural communities. He will be joined on the visit by Rural Affairs Minister, Jonathan Shaw.

Speaking ahead of the visit Stuart Burgess said, "I am looking forward to visiting Norfolk and hearing from individuals, communities and businesses about the challenges they face. This visit is focusing on two key topics – the availability of affordable rural housing and migrant workers, but I will also be listening to anything that people want to talk to me about.

"The lack of affordable housing continues to be one of the most serious, if not the most serious, problem facing rural England today. We are committed to working with Government and others to develop solutions for meeting rural housing needs.

"Migrant workers make a substantial contribution to the rural economy but they can be vulnerable and need support to maximise their contribution and ensure their integration with the wider community. This can present challenges for local authorities delivering services, such as housing, education and transport. We have argued the case to Government that funding for local authorities needs to better reflect the costs of meeting the needs of all local people, both established communities and migrant workers.

Jonathan Shaw said: "I am looking forward to hearing about what matters to people in rural Norfolk.

"I know that affordable housing is one issue. The Prime Minister has said that 'putting affordable housing within the reach of not just the few but the many is vital both to meeting individual aspirations and a better future for our country', and the recent Housing Green Paper reinforces our belief that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home at a price they can afford in a place in which they want to live and work.

"Today's visit also highlights the important contribution made by migrant workers to the region, and on the need to ensure that local public services are able to provide support and a welcome to those from abroad, on whom so many local businesses rely.

"The CRC's recent response to the report by the Government's Commission for Integration and Cohesion is an important contribution to the issue of migrant workers, and I am sure that the CRC will continue giving valuable, independent advice to government to help us ensure that rural communities get the public services they need."

ENDS

For further information Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070 or 07900 608030 or Defra Press Office on 020 7238 5391.

Notes for editors:

1. The day begins in Swaffham, meeting organisations that support migrant workers, local businesses who employ migrant workers and migrant workers themselves about their experiences working and living in rural Norfolk. The visit continues with discussions with local people involved in developing housing schemes, including a tour of a completed scheme in Great Massingham. The visit concludes with a meeting in King's Lynn with key regional and sub-regional organisations involved in working to support rural areas.
2. Pictures from the visit are available on request. When published, the following wording is to be included – "Photography © Commission for Rural Communities/Charlie Hedley 2007".
3. In 2006, average house prices in the King's Lynn and West Norfolk district were £170,390 with mean annual household incomes of £24,788.
4. The increase in national insurance registrations King's Lynn and West Norfolk in respect of non-UK nationals during the four-year period 2002/03 to 2005/06 was 3,450 or 215.2%. This compares with an increase for England overall – rural and urban – of 87.3%.
5. CRC's response to the final report of the Committee for Integration and Cohesion can be found at:
<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/events/ourresponsetothecommissiononintegrationandcohesionfinalreport>
6. The Commission for Rural Communities is an independent government body established in October 2006. Its role is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance. For further information, visit: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk