



## **Inquiry into the future for England's upland communities**

### **Main messages from South West regional hearing, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 2009, Ilsington, Devon**

This report summarises the main messages arising from the CRC's fifth regional hearing in Ilsington, Devon on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 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. The 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 inquiry 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:

**Berrio Mill Foods**  
**Blisland Community Association**  
**Bodmin Moor Commoner's Council**  
**Country Landowners and Business Association**  
**Cornish Moorlands Wines Ltd**  
**Cornwall Development Agency**  
**Cornwall Rural Community Council**  
**Countryside Alliance**  
**Council for the Protection of Rural England**  
**Creating Excellence**  
**Dartmoor Commoners' Council**  
**Dartmoor Farmers Ltd**  
**Dartmoor National Park Authority**  
**Dartmoor Preservation Association**  
**Devon Renaissance**  
**Devon Rural Network**  
**Duchy of Cornwall Estate**  
**Exmoor National Park**  
**Government Office for the South West**  
**Ilsington Country House Hotel**  
**Layland Branfield, Independent farmer**  
**National Farmers Union, South West**  
**Penwith Farm Business Centre**  
**Renewable Power Ltd.**  
**South Penquite Farm**

**South West ACRE Network**  
**South West Chamber of Rural Enterprise**  
**South West Regional Development Agency**  
**South West Uplands Federation**  
**South West Water**  
**The Exmoor Society**  
**Ylem Ltd**

## **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**

**Isolated communities:** Settlements in the South West uplands tend to be both small and sparse. They can become isolated during winter and during periods of bad weather. Some small communities don't have local access to services and some concern was expressed that those that are currently available may not be maintained in the future, attributed to a perceived decline in the numbers of hill farmers and the population generally. It was suggested that where a community does have sufficient critical mass, there tends to be more services e.g. pubs, shops, banks. Smaller communities are considered to be at a disadvantage where greater numbers of people are needed to make projects work e.g. schemes to improve broadband speed.

**Uplands culture:** People in the South West have strong links to their moors over generations and over centuries. One view is that field sports are rooted in the culture and community. There's a strong field sport network, especially hunting, which is an issue people in the South West uplands feel very passionate about. Shooting was described as a growing industry in the uplands.

Some participants felt there was a loss of skills and heritage in the uplands. Any vision for the uplands needs to include all members of upland communities including farmers and landowners.

**Second home owners:** Second homes are a contentious issue in the region and it is closely linked to a perceived lack of affordable housing. Strong sentiments were expressed such as too many second homes in a village could "kill" a community, driving up house prices and create "ghost towns". On the other hand, second home owners can and do benefit the local economy because they often buy local produce and use local tradesmen.

**Parish Plans:** In general, participants thought parish plans which involve the whole community can be very successful. Whilst parishes are often in favour of enhancement and preservation of their village, some development encourages and supports small businesses and local shops. Parish plans will often restrict over-development and any new development is kept in character of the village. They will object to detrimental developments.

**Young people:** Young people are moving out of the South West uplands, in part because there aren't many employment opportunities to encourage them to stay. Some think there's aren't enough incentives to encourage young people back to the moors.

## 2. Economies

**Uplands income:** It was suggested that the two main sources of income in the South West uplands are tourism and agriculture. The two sectors are linked; agriculture shapes the landscape which attracts the tourists to the region. Agriculture is still considered an important source of income but some farmers rely on alternative income streams to keep their farms viable. This practice of multiple income streams is not entirely new and has been occurring over many generations.

**Broadband:** Broadband services can be slow in the region's uplands, partly because of distances from the exchange, but they are still described as 'well used'. Broadband underpins many tourism businesses e.g. websites and online booking for holiday lets and communications by email. Upland businesses still need to be engaged and skills developed before they start using new IT systems.

**Adaptable workforce:** People do want to live and work in the region's uplands. The workforce was described as very adaptable and takes on new work e.g. construction and ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) work. Skilled staff are apparently available to work in hi-tech industries and many others were described as willing to be trained. Lack of public transport can be a problem because many young apprentices either cannot, or are not prepared to, drive long distances to work. There is understood to be a shortage of low skilled workers for the building trade, cleaning etc in the uplands, possibly because they can't afford to live in these areas. It was suggested that businesses also need to be adaptable to survive in the uplands.

**Tourism:** Tourism is important and there is huge potential for it in the South West uplands. The tourism strategy in the region could be more cohesive according to some. For example, a strong marketing campaign to promote the uplands and not just the coast.

A view was expressed that upland tourism businesses don't always understand that they are operating in a global market and, for some, their current perception is to only look at local competitors.

It was suggested that the uplands in the South West could follow Europe's lead and add a small tax to hotel and restaurant bills with money put towards supporting the uplands. However, during the discussion some thought a formal tourism tax would be difficult to administer and would be too much of a burden on tourism businesses leading to price rises. An admission fee to enter a National Park was also suggested but this could be unattractive to the public. One comment was that tourists already pay for the uplands through taxes and put money into the local economy. More subtle ways of getting tourist money into these areas were suggested e.g. hotels using local produce.

**Transport:** Transport in and out of the South West needs to be a balance between protecting the environment and improving the infrastructure for businesses that rely on supplies in and out of the region.

One perceived threat to the future of the uplands is the cost of fuel. Many garages in remote areas have facilities inferior to their urban counterparts, and high fuel prices are making it expensive to do something simple like shopping at a supermarket. Farmers emphasise that they would have to increase their produce prices to pay for the increase in the cost of diesel, but the public wouldn't be keen to pay for such price increases in the shops.

Parking in small upland villages can be an issue and can even be prohibited by the local authority. Small businesses have identified parking as key to the survival of their business.

**Hi-tech industries:** There is a perception that you can't run a hi-tech industry in the uplands. However there are examples of IT companies who can and do run successful businesses. Entrepreneurs continue to want to live in an attractive area and some describe that as a lifestyle choice. Many found employees were very happy to travel to upland locations for work, avoiding congestion on the roads and easy parking.

**Social enterprises:** Social enterprises and businesses were described as struggling to secure funding and, even if successful, it can take a long time before the funds become available.

**Micro-businesses:** Micro-businesses are setting up in redundant buildings especially where they are offered a range of incentives. Dartmoor has examples of wide ranging businesses using redundant buildings. However, transport was described as a problem by some businesses, specifically getting their products into the market.

**Investment:** The region's uplands apparently need investment in a variety of ways. Some suggested examples include: Improving skills and training e.g. marketing and networking for uplands businesses, developing co-op markets and incentives for young people to stay in the uplands. Suggested long term recommendations include investing in incentives which encourage wider public goods and benefits.

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

**Value of public goods and benefits:** The participants agreed it is very difficult to value and quantify all the public goods and benefits of the uplands e.g. how do you put a value on a view?

Hill farming in the South West has delivered public benefits including: public access on the moors, high water quality etc. Farmers emphasised the need to continue to deliver public goods if they want public support which the UELS (Uplands Entry Level Scheme) attempts to achieve.

One suggestion is that the public need to understand the value of the uplands and the costs involved in maintaining and sustaining the uplands which they currently use for free.

**Renewable energy:** The participants thought wind farms were not a popular form of renewable energy because the landscape that draws in the tourist economy would be damaged. This is regardless of the generous compensation schemes given to farmers and landowners. Other schemes were described as more suitable in the uplands e.g. micro-generators on streams and rivers or photo-voltaic cells on buildings.

The potential of hydro-power was discussed but there are problems of planning and funding availability. Cost is a barrier to small scale projects. Project development can be costly; planning is expensive and a lack of specialist skills means contracting expensive external consultants is unavoidable. Therefore it is often unrealistic for community-scale schemes to be progressed but there could be opportunity for large companies e.g. utilities to work and fund some hydro schemes.

**Water supply:** Up to 90% of the clean drinking water in the South West comes from the hills of Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor. 97% is surface water and there isn't much of a ground water supply. The water is generally good quality because few pesticides are used on the hills. There has only been a slight deterioration of the water quality caused by the management of the land. Old peat cuttings have increased erosion leading to an increase of humic material in the water causing it to turn brown which increases the cost of treatment.

The MIRE project is attempting to restore the function of hydrology in deeper peat on Exmoor. Runoff is reduced by retaining water in ditches and peat land is restored in the eco-system. The land is managed by lack of grazing and farming on high moors.

### **4. Farming**

**Commoners and commons:** The commoners and landowners on the moors of Devon and Cornwall have come together to form commoners' associations. These associations allow commoners to concentrate on agriculture and landowners on other aspects e.g. collaboration on access to land. Commoners' associations have formed fire brigades to tackle wildfires.

Under the Environment Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme, money is distributed among commoners to graze blanket bog etc. otherwise payments will be withdrawn. The future looks uncertain, however, because of the declining numbers of young commoners actively grazing their animals on the moors.

A perceived threat to the commons is a lack of a shared vision. The land is becoming degraded because of the production subsidies and there is a conflict between conservation schemes and production subsidies.

Bodmin Moor Commoners' Association are hoping to become statutory so they have a level playing field when working with government agencies.

**Environment Sensitive Area (ESA) schemes:** ESA was popular amongst upland farmers because it was flexible and there was one scheme for one area. The scheme included landscape, biodiversity and archaeology. The new Uplands Entry Level Scheme (UELS) is thought to be too centralised, too top down from Government with not enough flexibility for farmers.

**Upland Entry Level Scheme (UELS):** Participants thought farmers in general wanted to farm livestock, look after the countryside and be rewarded for producing food. There was a feeling that farmers felt forced into UELS and there was a lack of understanding in the farming community about the scheme. Hence a perception that the paperwork is becoming more complicated and difficult to understand.

It was suggested that UELS needs to be a middle ground between conservation and production which is described and prescribed at a local level. The one-size-fits-all approach isn't considered to be appropriate. Perhaps there needs to be more joint management planning with upfront engagement to help build trust between the agencies and farmers?

It was also thought that farmers need incentives to stay in the hills to produce livestock and not just to participate in environmental initiatives. One local interpretation of these schemes would be farmers auditing and monitoring themselves and keeping money in local communities.

**Diversification:** Traditional farms still remain in the region's uplands but many farmers have diversified or have a second income. Money is considered to be available for farmers to diversify but not to help them to farm efficiently. One suggestion was more help to enable farmers to adapt, enhance and improve their businesses. Farmers could collaborate widely when preparing to diversify e.g. anaerobic digestion. There is a concern that the number of tourist diversification businesses will reach saturation point.

**South West Uplands Task Force:** Identified how to maintain traditional agriculture delivering public benefits. The system needs to be underpinned by an annual payment scheme and an approach to agri-environment schemes which is individually tailored to each farm.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration between farmers was considered by participants to be important and needs to be made more attractive. Collaboration delivers networking opportunities and different skills from different people e.g. innovation or entrepreneurship although it does need someone to co-ordinate the scheme. Also collaboration could help farmers share and help each other with the regulatory burden.

## **5. Policy and practices**

**Cross boundary issues:** Exmoor National Park lies in two counties: Devon and Somerset. There is a perception that this can lead to cross-boundary difficulties e.g. two different county councils which have different service provision and different policies.

**Community engagement:** It can be difficult to engage the upland community to be involved in the decision making process.

They often have their own informal networks and finding the capacity so that groups can support themselves can be difficult. There can be tensions between locals and “incomers”. Incomers are often “young retired” and are very active in the community bringing their outside experiences to run, for example, local development trusts.

**Local decision making:** Many believe that local decision making would be popular in the region’s upland communities. Decisions made at the most local level could be made on funding and local advice with resources and money used locally. National Parks, AONBs and district councils could work with local communities to encourage decision making. At this present time, many parish councils don’t have the capacity to take forward actions.

**National Parks:** National Park Authorities play a significant role in the uplands of the South West. Participants thought the National Parks had generally good working partnerships and relationships.

Planning in the parks is considered by some to be constraining development but authorities do want to work with people at the start of the planning process to develop the best designs so planning is approved.

The role of National Parks could be increased to deliver locally tailored solutions. This would, however, need a shift in the administration of European money.

**Government agencies:** Some views suggest that Natural England is struggling with their key priorities of landscape, wildlife and agriculture advice. One suggestion was that the Government needs to be more flexible, and have more capacity to support local problems and challenges. An uplands mindset of disadvantage was described, and a feeling they are not understood by Government whose focus is considered to be on urban and inner city areas.

**Partnership working:** Partnership working can be very successful. This process is a valuable means of bringing people together. Local management is important e.g. the National Park or AONB can do it.

**Planning:** The planning process in parts of the South West uplands is complicated and long. In Dartmoor, they have an open door policy to give advice to potential applicants and become involved in the early stage of the process to gain mutual agreement. They are generally supportive of developing facilities which are already there. Planning in general described as demonstrating a lack of understanding about the appropriateness of development and appropriate policies should be put in place for different sectors.

## **6. Solutions**

Some suggested recommendations by participants at the hearing.

### **Communities:**

A participant gave an example of an affordable housing solution. An estate is building 10 homes on disused land. 5 will be affordable housing for locals and 5 for the open market. The 5 open market houses will pay for the affordable housing. The open market housing will be initially offered to locals for 6 months. The affordable housing is part of a shared ownership scheme.

### **Economies:**

Economic activity is needed to sustain a high quality environment. The local communities should be encouraged to be enterprising with lots of different businesses unconstrained by planning in the National Park. Entrepreneurship needs to be developed by working with colleges, apprenticeship schemes and new graduates.

Tax breaks for businesses who buy local produce.

**Public goods and benefits:**

Schemes to restore hydrology on the uplands could be designed through engagement with farmers.

There is an issue with risk of investment in renewable energy. New funds could be developed which combine Government grants and private investment. Underwriting the process and covering the risk could speed up the payback time to investors.

**Farming:**

Individual farms could develop their own sustainable delivery model for 10 years for payments on deliverables. The National Park could provide the administration for the scheme and Natural England could conduct the audit. This would enable farmers to decide their farms natural capacity for carrying stock.

**Policies:**

All Government agencies and other organisations should work together and agree the future of the uplands. This should involve going out to the upland areas and speaking with communities and farmers.

The National Park management plan approach should be taken rather than Local Area Agreements. It is a vehicle for all agencies, voluntary and community groups and includes communities, economy and environment with different organisations leading on different aspects. This integrated approach includes community-based consultation and engagement.

National Parks could work with farming communities to identify practical support and then advocate that support to other agencies. All targets should be integrated in one place and the whole of the upland economy targets supported by key agencies. The delivery funding would be spent locally. The agencies would be responsible for reporting on the delivery of targets which would reduce the bureaucracy on individuals. Farmers input are important using their skills and knowledge to maintain and enhance the uplands.

Counties that share uplands could share resources. It is important to share information and update all the upland communities.