



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

### **Main messages from the Yorkshire & Humber regional hearing, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Harrogate, North Yorkshire**

This report summarises the main messages arising from the CRC's second regional hearing in Harrogate, North Yorkshire on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009. It is intended to give a flavour of the breadth of issues and topics arising 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 the 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:

Airdale Partnership  
Countryside Alliance  
Country Land & Business Association  
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group  
Federation of Small Businesses - North Yorkshire  
Government Office for Yorkshire & the Humber  
Hill Farmer – Richard Hindlay  
Leeds & North Yorkshire Chambers of Commerce  
National Farmers Union – North East  
Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty  
Northern Dales Farmers Market  
North Yorkshire Moors Association  
North Yorkshire Moors National Park Authority  
North Yorkshire Rural Housing Enablers  
North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership  
Rural Action Yorkshire  
Ryedale District Council

Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services  
West Yorkshire Rural Partnership  
W R Outhwaite & Son Ropemakers  
Yorkshire & Humber Assembly  
Yorkshire Agricultural Society  
Yorkshire Dales LEADER programme  
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority  
Yorkshire Dales Society  
Yorkshire Forward  
Yorkshire Local Council Association  
Yorkshire Rural Transport Forum

## **Main Inquiry Messages**

For simplicity and easy reference, 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**

**Migration:** ageing population profile and middle-aged and older people moving into upland communities and young people moving out. The in-migration of affluent, highly mobile people has not helped to sustain local services such as shops and post offices.

Communities changing at increasing pace – the notion of an “indigenous community” was challenged.

Young people should be offered incentives to stay e.g. “growing roots”

**Affordable housing:** Kettlewell cited as village with high % of second homes and suggestion that prices have not been as badly affected by the recession as in some other parts of the region. Concern expressed that support for Rural Housing Enablers has been withdrawn by central government – though the Regional Assembly has found a way to ensure they continue in Yorkshire at least.

A big challenge has been NIMBY-ism and some parish councils acting as ‘gatekeepers’ to their communities. Rural Housing Enablers performed important role in educating and awareness raising as well as facilitating the development of affordable housing. View expressed that small developments of affordable housing should be located in every village – not constrained by crude criteria-based assessments of what is a sustainable community.

Other challenges in the provision of affordable housing much the same as rural areas generally, including: the lengthy process in creating affordable housing schemes – typically after the initial needs have already been displaced; inadequate grant rates that act as disincentive to Registered Social Landlords building rural schemes; and landowners often unwilling to release land as exceptions sites because of the “hope value” connected with their future potential value.

Support expressed for recent policy developments with Yorkshire's National Park Authorities apparently showing some readiness to consider refurbishment of redundant rural buildings for use as affordable housing as well as for business and employment purposes.

**Planning:** focusing development on larger towns has been a failure to recognise traditional settlement patterns, not least in the upland areas of Yorkshire.

The experiential evidence suggests mixed results in incorporating Parish Plans into their Local Development Frameworks. It's important that communities can "connect with" strategic planning to avoid upland areas being overlooked.

Some concern expressed that the idyllic, even nostalgic, images created of rural places have in themselves fuelled the NIMBY attitudes to new development. A suggestion was made that visual aesthetic qualities have been taking precedence over the more profoundly sustainable qualities of a community.

Farmers suggested development controls were often making it difficult to "scale up" production on farms, with new larger modern constructions required. This seemed particularly with concern to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the conservation of small, traditional but obsolete buildings seemed to take precedence.

**Community Development:** several suggestions that communities could benefit from an "outside stimulus", such as an enabler, facilitation service or development worker.

Example given of a community helping themselves. Clapham was cited as an active little community providing many of their own solutions, including transport sharing, bulk purchase of essentials such as diesel fuel and a community that has set out its priorities in a Parish Plan.

Suggestion that self-help and adaptability, in the face of limited options, are distinctive features of upland communities. The significance of the LEADER programme was referred to as part of the solution for the future of upland communities.

Other communities described as less sustainable because they contain large numbers of commuters, the networks of support are consequently weaker - "communities no longer need one another".

**Access to Services:** a particular challenge for many uplands areas is distance from, and therefore access to, a range of basic services.

The disproportionate dependence on the private car for transport means fiscal measures such as fuel duty and road tax can have an equally disproportionate impact.

**Fuel poverty:** examples of households facing severe deprivation in upland communities but hidden in the statistics. Reference specifically to fuel poverty, with reliance on solid fuels and lack of choice putting low income households in difficulty during the relatively cold months of the 2008/09 winter.

Reference made to a current Yorkshire Forward-funded project looking at connecting communities that are off the mainline gas, or helping them to find alternatives.

## 2. Economies

One of the distinctive features of working in the uplands is that when things go wrong, the options are very limited. Indeed, one description of the options for the northern uplands was put simply as: "grouse, sheep or forestry".

The immediate threat to the future of upland communities in England described as more of a threat to economic activity rather than the loss of places with people living in the uplands.

**Diversification:** Planning repeatedly cited as major obstacle to diversification, but evidence based on planning applications approved in the national parks suggests very high approval rates.

Suggested that there are now instances where diversification is threatening the maintenance of "traditional skills" in the uplands.

**Transport:** Recent heavy snowfalls in Yorkshire highlighted the limitations of the existing road network and transport infrastructure. Many businesses were effectively cut off for several days and illustrated the dependence small local businesses now have on transport communications/deliveries. It also reminded people why farmers need a 4x4 vehicle to get feed to animals, go to market, etc.

**Hill farmers:** point out the consequences of lower payments not only for the conservation of habitats, landscapes and culture, but also for local economies. Suggested that farming families are loyal to local businesses and services.

**Moorlands and shooting:** example given that majority of moorland managed for grouse shooting does not require support from taxpayers – described as a commercial operation that can contribute to local economies. Further point made that management of the moorlands in this way is also beneficial to several other public goods and services.

**Broadband:** Many businesses in the uplands are trying to be innovative and increasing numbers work from home, but the poor quality or even absence of broadband can restrict the opportunities for business and constrain their potential for growth.

Where businesses can locate anywhere, they often choose locations with good mobile and broadband coverage. Some concern that an opening up of the urban-rural digital divide could lead to further economic decline in upland areas.

The absence of broadband and mobile phone coverage in some parts of the uplands was described as part of a wider infrastructure deficit.

**Business Support:** Suggestion that business support provided in the 1990's was more tailored to rural and specifically upland areas, with reference made to CoSIRA as an organisation that not only provided diagnostic business support but actively promoted business growth and development in remote areas.

**Small business:** some complaint that the regulatory burden has a disproportionate impact on small businesses, so prevalent across the uplands of Yorkshire. However, point made that economies dominated by small business should be more robust and resilient to the potentially damaging effects of the recession.

**Economic output:** Aesthetic beauty of landscape does have an economic value but conventional measures focus on outputs or production. Farmers could erect wind turbines and produce electricity but policies often prevent this to protect the landscape.

Further point questioned the value of the Leeds City Region without the benefits it derives from the surrounding uplands.

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

**Landscape:** The benefits the uplands bring to the region are reflected by Yorkshire's nationally designated landscapes including two National Parks, as well as a small part of another, and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, it was pointed out that many other designations exist – reference being made to Bradford Metropolitan Borough's own Area of Landscape Conservation.

The changes in payments to farmers has affected the grazing of uplands, with the over-grazing/ under-grazing balance tipping towards under-grazing in some instances with the advent of the Single Payment Scheme (SPS).

Changes in land and property ownership are having an effect on Yorkshire's landscape, both good and bad. Until recent months (impact of recession) property developers were described as “queuing up” to buy and convert farm buildings for dwellings. However, many incomers were described as relying on the local farmers to help with land drainage, fertiliser application and general land management and stewardship.

**Agri-environment schemes:** Some concern expressed that Uplands Entry Level Scheme will lead to some land effectively being “moth-balled. Also, concerns that calculations being based on income foregone are no longer appropriate to secure the long-term management of the environmental benefits.

**Food security:** Interesting contradiction in views expressed, with some referring to evidence of growing demands for food, energy and water, whilst others referred to food production in the uplands as “a drop in the ocean” - implying an almost insignificant contribution to food security.

**Tourism:** Highlighted importance of farming's economic contribution to managing an attractive landscape that brings significant benefits from tourism. Point made that 'heather moorland is much more attractive than rough scrub and silver birch'.

**Culture and heritage:** hill farming described as “a way of life” with a long, long history and traditions particular to upland areas e.g. hefted flocks on the fells, and dialect across different upland areas. Cultural identity was described as important to Yorkshire's image as a place, often portrayed in arts, literature and television. Some concern that modern living, particularly associated with increasing mobility, was eroding this.

**Upland communities:** some debate over whether or not upland communities, providers of so many other public goods and benefits, are in fact a public benefit themselves.

### **4. Farming**

High quality landscape given as reason for Yorkshire's national designations, and the role of farmers in creating and managing that landscape should be understood.

Concern that the average age of hill farmers (national average given as 58 and suggested to be as high as 62 for North Yorkshire Moors) raises concerns that the land management skills may be lost over time.

Some satisfaction that the government has listened to the need for changes to be made to the Uplands Entry Level Scheme (UELS) but this was balanced by a general dissatisfaction that agri-environment payments will not be sufficient to maintain a hill farming industry. One farmer, who had been directly involved in the piloting of UEELS expressed concern that it could still prove difficult for many farmers to access the points-based scheme.

Further concerns related to the transition from the existing agri-environment schemes (Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Stewardship Scheme) to the new Environmental Stewardship, and a perception of “unnecessary bureaucracy” associated with the transfer. The point being that land already under existing management agreements should be given a streamlined transfer, rather than the form filling and point scoring.

The suggestion was made that the need to secure the future of upland land management through farming requires a clear vision or agenda for the uplands – “no more parachuting in with solutions”.

An apparent contradiction is the experiential evidence around the succession of tenanted farms. It is perceived as an immediate threat by some and not at all by others. Suggesting there may be particular difficulties in some specific localities rather than a general trend across the region.

Assumptions that land abandonment was in all cases a bad thing were challenged. “We can’t just hold up our hands in horror if land is abandoned. Perhaps it’s just the start of a new ecological process?”

Parts of Yorkshire, specifically the M62 corridor, described as a commuter belt where upland farms have been sold and ‘the land goes into disrepair’.

## **5. Policy and practices**

Suggested that a “big is best” philosophy apparent in government policymaking is proving enormously damaging to rural areas and remote rural communities particularly.

A perceived absence of “seed corn” funding to stimulate new or expanding enterprise in uplands of Yorkshire.

Disadvantage in upland communities largely the same as any other community but the lack of significant clusters of need means it is generally hidden, not picked up in statistics, and goes largely unaddressed. The main challenge continues to be one of service delivery rather than policy itself.

Pressures on the continuing existence of upland communities in Yorkshire are not a new phenomenon. The functions of place may change but communities somehow survive, e.g. reference made to infamous Category D villages in County Durham. This appears to challenge some notions of precisely what contributes to a “sustainable community”.

Policies restricting development and the population growth of small upland settlements described as one reason for “failing communities”, creating a downward spiral with loss of young people – loss of school – loss of employment – loss of services....

Suggested that planning policies are not in themselves causing difficulties, but rather their interpretation at the local level.

Policies should refer to payments for goods and services, not “handouts” or subsidies to farmers.

European and exchequer funding only reaching some parts of the community in upland areas, particularly those delivering environmental goods. Suggested that there’s a need to understand that good environmental outcomes are bound up with a viable future for upland communities.

The need for a detailed evidence base, currently hindered by the by sparsity and small numbers was suggested as a further policy challenge.

## **6. Solutions**

Solutions suggested included:

- Address the specific needs of the uplands in the forthcoming integrated regional strategy for Yorkshire.
- Parish councils can take a lead in helping upland communities to help themselves. What are needed are forward-looking, energetic local councils that can make a difference, e.g. by taking a lead on climate change, peak oil and fuel poverty.
- Allow hill farming families to build homes, through planning agreement, for sons/daughters on the farm.