



CRC 03/09

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### **Releasing the innovative potential of rural economies: 'the northern way'**

Following a report last year from the Rural Advocate to the Prime Minister on releasing the potential of England's rural economies, a summit on innovation is being held in York on Thursday 5 February. The Rt. Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be speaking at the summit and will set out the Government's response to the report and a refreshed approach to social and economic policies in rural areas.

Dr. Stuart Burgess, Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and the Government's Rural Advocate said: "The recession has brought the need for a strong commitment to releasing the potential of rural economies into sharp relief. I am delighted, therefore, that Hilary Benn will be describing the Government's considered response to my advice at this summit and outline a renewed commitment across Government to the 'rural proofing' of mainstream policies. It is vital that all Government's policies are delivered equitably in all places. This summit will give us reason to reflect on what that means for rural businesses that are seeking to harness the power of ideas, of new processes, of innovative products to develop, grow and improve wellbeing for their employees, entrepreneurs and communities.

"This summit is an important first step for policy makers and practitioners to convert some of my recommendations to the Prime Minister to reality. We have brought together people and organisations working in innovation and those supporting rural businesses and economies to reflect on the challenges thrown up by the recession and set out routes to support innovative thinking and action and provide leadership.

"We will build on the ideas and actions that emerge from this summit, with three similar events across England in which we will explore the other themes in my report – Investment, Inspiration and Leadership, and Empowerment – to release the potential of our rural economies and help to build recovery from this recession."

The summit is co-hosted with the northern Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) – Yorkshire Forward, Northwest Regional Development Agency and One North East – and will tackle how innovation can help strengthen rural economies, and how public bodies and businesses can cooperate to encourage and support innovation amongst rural enterprises.

Dr Burgess concluded, "I am delighted that the northern Regional Development Agencies have joined with the CRC to organise and run this summit, and for ideas and encouragement made by staff of the Northern Way. They are crucial partners in building a strong infrastructure and commitment to enable firms and communities across northern areas, rural and urban, to innovate. The commitment of the RDAs both today and in future summits is an invaluable demonstration of the collaborative approach my report is seeking to encourage".

On behalf of the northern RDAs Margaret Fay, Chairman of One North East, said: "Today's summit will help identify new ways of releasing further potential from rural economies. Innovation, of course, will play a key role in making this happen. We are continuing to work with Business Link to offer rural enterprises easier access to a range of business support solutions. In addition, we are delivering investment via the Rural Development Programme for England to assist rural firms to access new markets and take advantage of new opportunities."

MORE...

The CRC will prepare a separate statement setting out its reaction to Government's response to the report on releasing the potential of England's rural economies, and the ways in which it would now wish to see action being taken. We will also be following up the Government's renewed commitment to rural proofing at a major national policy conference in May, where will also formally launch a refreshed set of rural proofing tools.

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for editors:

1 The report, 'England's rural areas: steps to release their economic potential', by the Rural Advocate to the Prime Minister was submitted last summer and can be found at: [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/crc67\\_englands\\_rural\\_areas1.pdf](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/crc67_englands_rural_areas1.pdf)

The report 'Resilience and Opportunity: The Government's Response to the report of the Rural Advocate England's rural areas: steps to release their economic potential', February 2009 can be found at: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

2 The Northern Way is a unique initiative, bringing together the cities and regions of the north of England to work together to improve the sustainable economic development of the North towards the level of more prosperous regions.

Formed as a partnership between the three northern RDAs it also work with local authorities, universities, the private sector and other partners to secure a strong coalition in support of this goal.

It aims to influence policy and delivery at a local, city region, regional and national level, to join up thinking and encourage collaboration. Further information can be found at: [www.thenorthernway.co.uk](http://www.thenorthernway.co.uk)

3 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to Government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

We have three key functions:

- advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to Government and others;  
and
- independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at:

[www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk)