



CRC 11/08

Thursday 9 October 2008

Government's Rural Advocate launches inquiry into future for England's upland communities

Today (Thursday, October 9, 2008), Dr Stuart Burgess the Government's Rural Advocate and Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is launching a wide-ranging inquiry into the future for England's upland communities. England's uplands correspond to 'less favoured areas' and can be found in the north and south west and in areas along the Welsh border. The English uplands occupy 18 per cent of the country's land area and have special significance, not just for their contribution to rural economies, but also their key role nationally in landscape conservation, recreational activities, biodiversity, heritage and water management.

Speaking at the North West Rural Affairs Forum's annual conference in Cumbria Dr Burgess said: "I am delighted to be here today to launch this important inquiry into the future for England's upland communities. By their very nature, upland communities face tough conditions. I am continually impressed by the energy, industry and determination of the people living and working there and also by their current and potential contribution to wider environmental and other ambitions. But it was the concerns being expressed in these upland areas that led to me stating my intention to the Prime Minister to establish an inquiry examining how England's upland communities can best equip themselves to thrive in the twenty-first century.

"My visit to Cumbria last year, to see first-hand the impacts of livestock movement restrictions on hill farmers and the wider economy, revealed a much wider set of concerns and inter-related issues regarding the future of upland areas. I have since visited the south west, Yorkshire and most recently the north east to explore these important issues with local communities and to begin our preparations for the inquiry. These visits have proved invaluable in increasing my understanding of the issues and helping to identify the specific challenges needing attention. Today I am announcing what the inquiry is intending to achieve and the start of an extensive period of consultation to hear views from people and organisations up and down the country, before preparing a full report this time next year.

"The inquiry will aim to identify and evaluate the key drivers of change in the upland communities of England, and to develop and promote realistic policy recommendations that enable and equip these communities to move towards more secure, economically prosperous and sustainable futures.

"The CRC's distinctive contribution to this issue stems from our role as the Government's advisor on economic and social challenges in rural England. We are very grateful for advice and support from Natural England, the Regional Development Agencies and Local Authorities, who have key roles in strategic planning and delivery. We are very grateful also for the advice and support from the Regional Rural Affairs Forums. We look forward to continuing our close work with all of these partner organisations and of course with the upland communities and their representatives."

Jack Ellerby, Chair of the North West Rural Affairs Forum and conference chair, said: "The special upland landscapes of the North West are vital to the health and prosperity of not just the people of our region but the many millions who visit each year. Yet we should not forget that we need vibrant rural communities underpinning the management and economies of these upland areas. We applaud and support the CRC's inquiry and our conference in Kendal will help to shape the future success of our upland communities."

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For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for editors:

1. CRC's upland communities inquiry is being launched at the North West Rural Affairs Forum's conference entitled *Land use in the uplands — strengthening businesses and communities* taking place at the Castle Green Hotel in Kendal on Thursday 9 October.

Further details of the North West Rural Affairs Forum and its work can be found at:

www.gos.gov.uk/gonw/nwraf/

2. Information about the English uplands can be found on Defra's website at:

www.defra.gov.uk/rural/uplands/default.htm

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 advisor: 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