



CRC 10/09

16 April 2009

Rural Advocate visits Duke of Westminster's estate in Forest of Bowland to hear views of upland farming communities

The harsh challenges facing upland communities in the Forest of Bowland come under the national spotlight on 16 April with a visit by England's Rural Advocate.

Dr. Stuart Burgess, the Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) is visiting farmers on the Duke of Westminster's Abbeystead Estate to collect evidence for a major investigation into the challenges facing upland communities. As well as meeting tenant farmers, he will attend a meeting with other invited hill farmers, businesses and local community representatives from further afield across Lancashire.

Welcoming the visit by Dr. Burgess and his team, the Duke of Westminster said, "The traditional rural land uses of hill farming and shooting have shaped the Bowland landscape which is now also protected by designations such as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Site of Special Scientific Interest. The challenge facing policy makers today is sustaining the rural economy, communities and businesses and determining the role for these tried and tested management systems.

"I hope that the views and opinions aired at the inquiry will form a basis for policy to support and strengthen the future for England's upland communities."

Dr Burgess said: "I am extremely grateful to the Duke of Westminster for enabling me to visit his estate and speak with farmers and those who live and work in this upland area.

"Living and working in sparsely-populated places like the Forest of Bowland is rarely as romantic as outsiders like to dream. It is tough at the best of times, and has been made even more so of late because of animal disease, flooding, reduced access to essential services and the general downturn in the economy.

"The CRC is holding the inquiry to determine how the nation can best equip upland communities to secure their economic prosperity and provide sustainable benefits for all. My visit is to seek first-hand views and experiences of businesses and communities on their fears and hopes as farmers and food producers, providers of tourism and recreation resources, and as the guardians of landscape, wildlife, heritage and natural resources."

The information and views examined by the inquiry panel will help shape a report to the Prime Minister recommending ways to create a brighter future for upland communities.

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes to editors:

1 Further information about the Abbeystead Estate can be found at: www.grosvenorestate.com

2 The upland communities inquiry call for evidence closes on 30 April and anyone living or working in upland areas is invited to submit their views to the CRC. Comments can be made online by completing a short questionnaire at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/uplandcommunities/overview or in writing to Uplands Inquiry, Commission for Rural Communities, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3RA

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 underperformance.

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