



Rural Economies Recession Intelligence

February 2009

Briefing note from CRC to Hilary Benn

Employment and the rural labour market

Summary

Many small and peripheral rural economies are seeing

- rapid and substantial increases in those registered for Job Seekers Allowance
- very low numbers of unfilled vacancies, and
- insufficient resources to offer local retraining.

This is so serious that CRC recommends the Secretary of State makes this the first 'focus for advice', as announced at our first rural Summit – for action by CRC, Regional Development Agencies and others.

Headline findings

- While overall unemployment rates are lower in rural than urban areas, Job Seekers' Allowance data for the year to end January 2009 shows **some of the steepest rise in unemployment rates in several sparse and peripheral rural districts.**
- **The number of people chasing every 'unfilled vacancy' in many peripheral rural districts is far higher than the average across Britain** and in the worst cases – Restormel in Cornwall and Staffordshire Moorlands for example – higher than in major urban unemployment blackspots.
- Local authorities (including rural authorities) are developing programmes and support initiatives. However, **some rural local authorities and Job Centre plus offices are struggling to provide retraining and support their unemployed** because of distances to training and support centres and the lower numbers involved.

CRC will explore further the nature and profile of these challenges and possible actions with the local authorities and RDAs affected.

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Unemployment

1. The Labour Force Survey shows unemployment¹ rates rose again in October-December 2008 from the previous quarter, although – as shown in Defra's 'Dashboard of Indicators' – DWP claimant rates across England's rural local authorities remains lower than those in urban authorities.
2. During January, several county councils and rural local authorities reported changes in the levels of Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) claimants² over the previous year. Some rural districts, including some of England's least populated and/or peripheral rural districts, have proportionally higher rates and greater increases in unemployment than towns and cities.
3. In the year December 2007 to December 2008 for example, the average increase in JSA claimants across **North Yorkshire** was 51.5% (an additional 2446 claimants), but in Craven and Richmondshire districts the increases were 66.1 and 67% respectively. In Scarborough alone, 651 more residents were receiving JSA by December 2008 than a year earlier. The rates of increase appear to be accelerating in some rural districts – and at a faster rate than in towns and cities in the same county (*reported by North Yorkshire County Council*).
4. In **Gloucestershire**, unemployment had risen by January 2009 to its highest since March 2000 (9478, or 2.7%), with the highest level (3.6%) in the Forest of Dean. In the month to January 2009, unemployment in the county increased by 1259, or 15.3%. Rural districts saw the highest monthly increase, with rural Cotswold district recording a 22.3% increase, nearly twice that of Cheltenham (12.5%).
5. **Cumbria** Vision's monthly economic briefing (No 3, February 2009) similarly reports that "the largest proportionate rises in unemployment over the past 12 months have been in South Lakeland and Eden, even though the two [rural] districts still have the lowest actual levels of unemployment."
6. Between October-December 2007 and the same quarter in 2008, redundancies in rural areas increased by 128% to 37,842 (compared with 186,046, 150%, in urban centres). The Labour Force Survey confirms an increasingly steep rise in unemployment in rural compared with urban areas. The increase in redundancies between quarters three and four (July-September and October-December) was 106% in rural areas but only 57% in urban. Breaking these down by sector, shows that rural labour markets are being challenged in very different ways to urban centres.

Manufacturing: During the quarter October-December 2008, compared with the same quarter in 2007 redundancies in rural manufacturing industries increased by 293%³, nearly three times the rate in urban England, although the last quarter saw a more rapid rate of manufacturing redundancies in urban than rural firms.

Retail and hospitality: employees were more likely to be made redundant by urban than rural firms.

Banking and financial services: similar levels in rural and urban firms until the last quarter of 2008, when the rate of rural redundancies increased by 150% to 7,813 jobs, contrasting with a 40% increase in urban centres.

¹ International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment

² Job Seekers Allowance is considered to be the most accurate report of unemployment.

³ Labour Force survey sectoral data could be based on small samples and should be treated with caution.

TABLE 1 - Job Seekers Allowance claimant numbers and vacancies – 2009				
<i>unemployment and vacancies in an illustrative selection of regions, rural and city local authorities</i>				
Local authority district	% unemployed*	JSA claimants	Unfilled vacancies	JSA claimants per unfilled vacancy
Oswestry	3.1	750	100	7.5
North Shropshire	2.6	910	87	10.5
Staffs Moorlands	2.5	1447	53	27.3
Stoke on Trent	5	7435	519	14.3
Birmingham	6.2	41,816	3246	12.9
West Midlands	4.5	146,790	13,642	10.8
Berwick	3.3	486	90	5.4
Tynedale	2.2	791	115	6.9
Teesdale	2.7	387	19	20.4
Middlesborough	6.5	5546	303	18.3
Newcastle	4.5	7908	1038	7.6
North East	4.8	75,658	6563	11.5
Torridge	3.1	1153	82	14.1
Kerrier	2.7	1571	89	17.7
Penwith	3.6	1379	109	12.7
Restormel	3.5	2124	72	29.5
Purbeck	1.7	447	29	15.4
Plymouth	3.4	5323	518	10.3
Swindon	3.6	4350	523	8.3
South West	2.5	76,814	13,959	5.5
North Norfolk	3.1	1654	140	11.8
Suffolk Coastal	1.8	1292	231	5.6
King's Lynn	3.1	2539	394	6.4
Peterborough	4.1	4169	433	9.6
Harlow	4.3	2088	171	12.2
East of England	2.8	95,475	12,105	7.9
Eden	1.3	390	243	1.6
Allerdale	3.0	1642	164	10.0
Ribble Valley	1.3	438	154	2.8
Barrow	3.1	1352	127	10.7
Manchester	4.7	14,595	1631	8.9
Liverpool	6.7	18,836	2316	8.1
North West	3.9	164,996	19,018	8.7
* % unemployed – JSA claimants as % of employed				
Source: Gavurin G-View and nomis from DWP data				

7. Loss of fixed term, seasonal, agency and casual employment is not recorded in Labour Force Survey redundancy records. By quarter three (October-December) 2008 at least 212,000 people were in some form of temporary employment⁴ in rural areas, as were more than 1 million urban workers. Between quarter three 2007 and the same quarter in 2008, casual workers in rural areas declined by 9%, seasonal workers by 16.8%, and there were 7257, or 25%, fewer workers in other forms of temporary tenure.

Vacancies

8. Unemployment figures tell only part of the recession impact in rural areas. Data from DWP on 'unfilled vacancies' notified to Job Centre Plus show that in many areas, rising unemployment is coinciding with a fall in notified vacancies. Out-of-work rural residents in several of these deeply rural and peripheral districts have very few vacancies available to them (see table).

⁴ Seasonal work, contract, agency, casual, not permanent in some other way (LFS)

9. In **Cumbria** the number of new vacancies notified to Job Centre Plus in the month to December 2008 was 700 fewer than in the previous month – and 1,100 fewer than in December 2007. Many unemployed rural residents could face a harder search for re-employment than their counterparts in our cities and larger towns, even though urban boroughs have more people out of work.
10. Announcements of planned and confirmed redundancies and job losses confirm that unemployment will continue to rise in many market towns and rural districts. Other indicators point to consequential difficulties for rural residents. For example, **West Devon Borough Council (WDBC)** reports that their housing staff are seeing an increase in approaches by residents who have lost jobs and are renting (particularly casual employees laid off by factories). WDBC's Head of Economic and Community Development also reports that their customer services staff are seeing more people seeking information about benefits, and an increase of 6 - 7% in the year-on-year increase in benefits take-up. **Derbyshire County Council** passed on evidence from East Midlands' Business Link, which is reporting an increase in people still in employment but worried about redundancy, attending business start-up workshops and enquiring about self employment.
11. Difficulties for the rural unemployed are not represented, or explained, by quantitative evidence alone. **Eden District Council in Cumbria** – which has one of the steepest increases in unemployment in Cumbria in 2008, still has a comparatively healthy level of vacancies notified to the Job Centre Plus in January 2009 – illustrates the difficulties:

'Eden Skills' is a project by Eden Council and others to deliver skills demanded by local employers in Eden's small towns which they regard as key service centres. Their efforts have been thwarted by inflexible rules and targets associated with possible funding streams. For example, the Job Centre plus manager sought the Council's help to train locally 24 people to get the requisite 'green card' for construction jobs – as an alternative to expecting them to travel to Carlisle for training, some 20-30 miles away. The Economic Regeneration Manager reports there is not enough money to make local provision happen – "local employers are keen to offer work to local people, but they want flexible assistance to train workers in the workplace."

Job and business support

12. There is a growing number of initiatives to support employees, businesses and communities across the UK, including those described by a rapid study by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies into Local Authority responses to the economic downturn. We have additionally received reports from
 - Derbyshire County Council's Cabinet member for Regeneration
 - Government Office for the West Midlands
 - Cumbria Vision and Cumbrian Tourism.
 Activities range from working with sector skills councils and training providers to include additional employer-requested courses in Train to Gain and other employment and training schemes, to increased promotion and workshops by Business Link, to new jobs lines and investment schemes.
13. Support programmes appear to be aimed at safeguarding jobs, recovering firms under threat of closure, helping employees facing redundancies or who have lost their jobs and boosting business survival or start-ups. But they are unlikely to boost the number of jobs available to rural people. As an early priority for the group announced by the Secretary of State to advise him of suitable measures, **we recommend that discussions be held about potential public sector support programmes to strengthen or create new jobs in peripheral and sparse rural areas.** This group would comprise chairs of the RDAs and CRC, among others.

Other impacts to be addressed

14. Support is also needed to address smaller, local, ongoing and widespread impacts of the recession on rural firms and services, on charities, parish councils and communities. Amongst those reported to us this month, were those described by:
 - an **East Midlands RAF** member (supermarkets seeking to force down prices to suppliers and a collapse of demand for organic produce);
 - **Gloucestershire Rural Community Council** (closure of the county outlet for local and micro food producers; reduced sales by furniture makers and retailers, solicitors and estate agents, empty rural workshops, reduced revenue for charities and use of community assets);
 - Potter's Leisure Resort in **Norfolk** which might lose some long-standing events including a world bowls tournament because of poor internet connections and inability to advertise on basic broadband service;
 - **Devon Association of Parish Councils** many of which are trying to keep precepts down but who are not planning development projects for the year or not complete projects that would be appreciated by local people;
 - **Kent Rural Board** reporting anecdotal evidence of 10-15% downturn in rural shop turnover; increases in lending charges for land-based firms and longer paying times by larger to small firms. Also anecdotal evidence of an increase in rural crime including theft of machinery and fertiliser.

Market towns

15. We continue to monitor the impact, particularly of closures of high street branches of national chains, in market towns. Reports continue to demonstrate diversity in impact and response (see media summaries attached). Towns from Dorking in Surrey, Banbury in Oxfordshire to Driffield in Yorkshire, report growing numbers of empty shops. In contrast a survey by the Western Daily Press reports that independent stores in many of the mid-western market towns are doing well, with several new shops opening.
16. In some instances traders and local organisations have created forums to promote the towns' profile. Many local authorities are responding – for example, Derbyshire County Council and the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership have arranged free workshops for independent traders in its 18 market towns to learn new skills to help their shops thrive.
17. As more national chains fold, or are at risk or closing branches, market towns are experiencing two other effects:
 - i) Some former national chain premises are being sold by administrators to other chains or local owners, or to their former owners, as happened with much of the Adams childrenswear chain. Cumbria Vision reports for example that four of nine of the county's Woolworths stores – in Penrith, Kendal, Ulverston and Keswick – have found new occupiers.
 - ii) Rent/ financial demands of commercial property landlords are helping to bring about the closure of branches/ franchised premises, and indeed whole chains. A national instance of this is the Stylos chain of shoe stores which had several market town branches including Barratts and PriceLess, which was reportedly forced into administration by the demands of a landlord of a handful of premises. Another local example is in Evesham, Worcestershire with the closure of the homewares and furniture store, Cargo, as a result of failure to agree a new lease with a 50% rent increase with its London-based landlords.

18. These are also difficult times for commercial property landlords. However, might it be valuable for the Secretary of State to seek advice from BERR, RDAs, CRC and local authorities about the potential for strategic negotiations/ action with retail chains and their landlords about their approach to decisions affecting their branches in smaller and market towns.

Media Coverage

Business - Support

ACAS and Yorkshire Forward offer redundancy advice to region's companies

Yorkshire firms facing the prospect of making redundancies are being offered specialist advice by Yorkshire Forward and arbitration service ACAS Redundancy issues now account for almost a third of all calls to the ACAS national helpline. (07/02/09, Examiner)

Boost for aerospace industries

Worcestershire aerospace and defence industries have received a boost from a new support package to help companies make the most of global opportunities worth billions of pounds. The £1.5m World Class Supply Chains Initiative, funded by Advantage West Midlands and delivered by the Manufacturing Advisory Service in partnership with Midlands Aerospace Alliance, will provide support to more than 90 firms. (06/02/09, Dudley News)

Firms welcome £3bn business fund

Business leaders have welcomed a £3bn fund to boost lending to small firms. The fund, which will be split into 23 regional tranches, follows a government decision last month to restructure its investment in Royal Bank of Scotland and its subsidiary NatWest. Money will be delivered through a range of mechanisms, including the recently announced Enterprise Finance Guarantee and European Investment Bank funding, in addition to traditional lending. It will include loans with repayment holidays and the option to raise cash against business assets. The Forum of Private Business said it hoped small business customers would be able to access adequate levels of finance to preserve cash flow and allow planning for the future. (05/02/09, Rural Service Network Online)

Chance of cash aid for rural businesses

Rural East Anglian businesses could get a helping hand to beat the recession as a part of a £10m initiative to create or maintain up to 380 countryside jobs. Firms and would-be entrepreneurs in three areas of Norfolk and parts of north Suffolk are being urged to bid for the cash, thanks to a successful bid for European funding by Norfolk County Council and the Norfolk Rural Business Advice Service. Applicants will be expected to provide match funding that could double the boost to the local economies. (02/02/09, North Norfolk News)

Store scoops £20,000 council pledge

Sparsholt Village Shop Association has been granted £20,000 as part of Hampshire Council's pledge to protect services and local stores. The Village Community Grant Scheme offers funding to increase the use of village shops or to create community-led village stores, particularly in communities that have lost their post office. The grant for Sparsholt has enabled the association to take over the village shop and Post Office, with funds going towards first year operation costs and the purchase of stock. (21/01/09, Rye & Battle Observer)

Business & Employment – Bucking the Trend

Shops come out fighting

A Western Daily Press survey has revealed that while household names are folding, some independent traders are reporting a boom. Florists, boutiques and even estate agents are opening in towns across the region. Wiltshire towns Tidworth and Corsham have seen no shop closures and several new businesses starting up.

Findings were similar for other West Country towns Keynsham, Glastonbury, Midsomer Norton, Chippenham and Cirencester, which have all seen more shops open than close, or the same number reopen as have closed. (16/02/09, **Western Daily Press**)

Shoe firm boss 'to buy back stores'

The chairman of PriceLess and Barratts shoe chain parent, Bradford-based Stylo, is planning to buy back 200 stores and safeguard around 3,000 jobs. Michael Ziff, whose family owns 65% of the group, is working on the deal with administrator Deloitte. Stylo operates 400 high street shoe stores in the UK under the Barratts and PriceLess brands and employs 5,450 staff. (16/02/09, **Rye & Battle Observer**)

Norfolk in 100 new jobs boost

Tourist bosses are creating 100 new jobs to cope with the extra people expected to spend their holidays in Norfolk this year. The company which runs Bantham Zoo and Dinosaur Adventure at Weston Longville and Lowestoft's Africa Alive, is looking for staff to work the six-month summer season for admissions teams, gift shops, catering, cleaning and visitor information. (12/02/09, **Norwich Evening News**)

Businessmen launch new consultancy

A team of Yorkshire professionals and businessmen have joined forces to launch a new consultancy. Armitage Jones LLP will offer specialist advice and hands-on help to companies with corporate restructuring and recovery and funding issues. Based in Ilkley, it has already been approached to advise businesses in Leeds and across the North of England. (11/02/09, **Yorkshire Evening Post**)

50 jobs saved after two firms bought

More than 50 jobs have been saved at two Trowbridge companies after a local business brokered a deal between the two companies. John Boden has taken over Cromwell Press and its former parent company, Information Technology Incentives. Some who lost their jobs when administrators came in could be re-employed. (08/02/09, **Wiltshire Times & Chippenham News**)

Pontin's to create thousands of jobs

Holiday company Pontin's is creating 2,000 new jobs in Britain. The news comes just weeks after the company announced its centre near Great Yarmouth was to close. The jobs boost is part of a £50 million investment by Pontin's owner, Ocean Parks, and should see major improvements at its six centres across the country. There are hopes that the recession, combined with the weak pound, will see holidaymakers staying in Britain this summer – and should also attract overseas visitors attracted by relatively low prices in this country. (03/02/09, **East Anglian Daily Times**)

Recession is cobblers for shoe repairer

A cobbler says business is booming as recession-hit customers are getting shoes repaired instead of splashing out on new ones. Steve Hodgson, of Master Services, Pallion, says trade has shot up in the last six months. (28/01/09, **Sunderland Echo**)

10,000 jobs could be created at Sellafield

The Nuclear Decommissioning Agency expects to nominate Sellafield, Wylfa, Oldbury and Bradwell as potential sites for new nuclear power stations. The multi-billion pound investment for the area could bring £2 billion to the local economy, create 1,000 permanent skilled worker positions and 9,000 jobs during construction. (28/01/09, **Whitehaven News**)

Retirement village will bring 100 jobs to area

A £60M retirement development near Wantage will create 100 new jobs. There will be full and part-time positions at Letcombe Regis Retirement Village. (27/01/09, **Oxford Times**)

Hotel plans more rooms

New jobs will be created as part of plans for an extension of Uttoxeter's largest hotel, the 41-bedroom Racecourse Premier Inn, adjacent to the A50 on the outskirts of the market town.

Proposals for 34 more bedrooms have been drawn up but the company is refusing to reveal the number of jobs likely to be created in a town hit by huge job cuts at digger-giant JCB. (26/01/09, **This is Stafford**)

Village shop bucks trend

A village shop near Trowbridge is maintaining a 15 per cent increase in sales year-on-year. The shop opened in 2005 with a £57,000 rural renaissance grant and £12,500 from villagers' own pockets. It is community-owned and operated and run not-for-profit. As well as providing the usual things, it also sells locally made products, has a coffee shop, dry-cleaning service, shoe repairs and a book club. The shop has won awards and is attributed with renewing a sense of community in the village. (22/01/09, **Wiltshire Times & Chippenham News**)

Firm hopes to create 1,000 jobs

A technology firm hopes to create 1,000 manufacturing jobs in Worcestershire. Bosch Thermotechnology already employs 1,150 people at its headquarters in Warndon in Worcester. (14/01/09, **BBC News**)

Homes and jobs boost for Bridgwater

Bridgwater has been given a massive economic boost as plans to create thousands of new homes and jobs have been revealed. Developer Hallam Land Management has submitted a huge scheme to overhaul land to the north east of town. The plans could create 2,000 homes and up to 1,000 jobs. (14/01/09, **Bridgwater Mercury**)

Business centre to create 40 jobs

Work is due to begin on a new £1.9m business centre in Cumbria which it is hoped will create up to 40 new jobs. The centre is being made possible thanks to £650,000 worth of regional funding from West Lakes Renaissance, via the Northwest Regional Development Agency. (14/01/09, **BBC News**)

Jobs saved at 11th hour

Almost 200 jobs have been saved after a Northumberland food factory was rescued by its own management at the eleventh hour. Cheviot Foods at Amble had been expected to be sold to Country Chef after being placed into administration. But the buyer pulled out just hours before a deadline imposed by administrators. With 190 jobs hanging in the balance, Cheviot Foods' own directors safeguarded the future of the business by completing a deal to buy the factory. (03/01/09, **JournalLive**)

Business & Employment – Hit by the recession

Toyota blamed as axe falls at radiator company

Ninety jobs are to be axed at a company which makes radiators for the agricultural industry. Denso Marston in Baildon near Bradford, which employs more than 600 staff, has begun a 30-day consultation process. The proposed redundancies are blamed on losses at car-maker Toyota which own a 23% stake in Denso. (12/02/09, **Yorkshire Post**)

Local foundry axe 30 more jobs

Thirty metal workers have lost their jobs at a Black Country foundry, bringing recent redundancies at the plant to 130. Castings PLC in Brownhills has been hit hard by a downturn in orders from clients such as Volvo and Scania. The plant's surviving workforce of 290 have to go down to four-day weeks. (12/02/09, **Express and Star**)

Gooch and Housego set to axe jobs

Ilminster-based firm Gooch and Housego is set to make redundancies and bring in a reduced working week. The high-grade optical equipment manufacturer which employs 125 people at its factory near Ilminster, last month announced an expected reduction in profits causing its share price to fall by more than half. (12/02/09, **Chard & Ilminster News**)

Staff at Pike Textile lose jobs

A fifth of staff at Pike Textile in Wisbech have been made redundant. The company, which has survived for the last 100 years, has shed 19 jobs. Managing Director Jon Allen said: "We planned for less work this year but the reduction in orders since Christmas has been such that we now have to make cuts." (09/02/09, **Cambs Times**)

Cleator hat factory faces closure

33 jobs are at risk at a Cumbrian hat factory. The US-owned company, famous for its Kangol range, said its UK arm had not been profitable for years. (09/02/09, **Whitehaven News**)

Cement factory staff to undergo interviews

Staff at Lafarge Cement Works in Westbury will discuss their future after the decision to mothball the plant. A spokesman said: "If they are mobile, we can redeploy them to other plants in the UK." (09/02/09, **Wiltshire Times & Chippenham News**)

Yeo Valley job cut consultation nearing end

Workers at Cannington dairy Yeo Valley will learn their fate in early March when a consultation ends on plans to cut 100 jobs. (08/02/09, **Bridgwater Mercury**)

Littleport HiTech firm cuts workforce

Nineteen redundancies have been announced at a manufacturing plant in Littleport. JDR Cable Systems supplied underwater cabling to the world's largest offshore windfarm last year, and has clients in the oil and gas industry. (03/02/09, **Ely Standard**)

Last shift for 190 Greaves workers

One of Scarborough's largest employers has closed after more than 60 years in the town. Closure of Polestar Greaves' finishing and bindery factory has led to 190 jobs losses and brings total job losses at the company to almost 400. Of the 190 workers who have lost their jobs, only 39 per cent are expected to sign on for benefits. Lesley Richardson of Scarborough JobCentre, said: "I have been visiting the site regularly to prepare for the closure." (30/01/09, **Scarborough Evening News**)

Jobs go as estate agent closes

A Norfolk estate agency is in administration after laying off 25 workers and closing eight branches. Tops Property Services is axing six branches in Norwich and its suburbs, plus others in Dereham and Reepham. (30/01/09, **Scarborough Evening News**)

Rubber firm axes 60 staff

A Staffordshire automotive component supplier has gone into administration and axed 60 staff. The Norton Canes-based Stafford Rubber Company with 80 staff was founded in 1975 and makes foam inserts for products such as door interiors. One of the company's major customers had been Jaguar Land Rover. (29/01/09, **Express & Star**)

Job loss fears at factory

Jobs are to be axed by label manufacturer, Paragon Labels, which supplies supermarkets, is looking to make 50 redundancies. The firm has factories in Boston, Wisbech, Spalding and Gainsborough. Managing director Tony Lennon said a downturn in sales and a significant increase in raw material costs had forced the lay-offs – initially pitched at 90 jobs. (28/01/09, **Boston Standard**)

Caterpillar suspends production for 12 weeks

Production is to be suspended at Caterpillar in Peterlee for up to 12 weeks to deal with a fall in demand and avoid job cuts, say union officials. The factory will halt work on articulated lorries for five weeks, with the staff receiving 75 per cent of usual wages. The company employs 700 people in the North West Industrial Area. (28/01/09, **Sunderland Echo**)

Three-day week for Aston Martin

Luxury car maker Aston Martin has put production line staff on a three-day week.

The company, based in Gaydon, Warwickshire, said the new shift pattern was temporary and affected about 500 staff. The firm announced 600 redundancies in December. **(28/01/09, BBC News)**

Batley-based lender Cattles forced to withdraw banking licence application

Yorkshire financial services firm Cattles, which announced plans to cut up to 1,000 jobs earlier this month, was hit by a fresh setback today. The Batley-based lender, which specialises in loans to the sub-prime market, has been forced to backtrack on attempts to seek a banking licence. It said that following discussions with the Financial Services Authority, permission was unlikely to be granted until the current turmoil in the financial markets had stabilised and the terms of the group's renegotiation of £635m of its bank facilities were known. Cattles decided to withdraw its application until there was greater clarity on both matters. **(26/01/09, Yorkshire Evening Post)**

Redundancies at British Gypsum

Up to 20 workers in Robertsbridge are to lose their jobs at construction firm, British Gypsum. **(21/01/09, Rye & Battle Observer)**

Food firm Vion plans 200 redundancies

Food firm Vion is axing 200 jobs in Yorkshire as part of moves to shed 820 jobs. Vion plans to close its abattoir, butchery and parts of its retail operations at Haverhill and transfer them to Malton while cooked meat production will move from Malton to Haverhill. Vion said it had been conducting an extensive review of UK operations in a competitive marketplace with over-capacity within the UK meat sector. **(22/01/09, Yorkshire Evening Post)**

Administrators close four hotels

Administrators appointed by Real Hotel Group, will close hotels in Thetford, Newcastle upon Tyne, Northwich, and Newcastle-under-Lyme. Real Hotel Group operates 40 hotels and employs around 1,200 staff in the UK. Fall in occupancy rates and food sales was due to a slower return to work by corporate customers after Christmas. **(22/01/09, Telegraph)**

Car dealer axes staff

A car dealer has become the latest victim of the credit crunch after going into administration. 11 staff at Vauxhall dealership Gurneys of Benson have been made redundant with a further 27 facing uncertainty during the search for a possible buyer. **(20/01/09, Oxford Times)**

Axe falls on jobs at housing association

Jobs have been axed at a housing association, Havebury Housing Partnership. 15 posts at Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill are to go in March and September. **(19/01/09, Suffolk & Essex online)**

Printer closes with 170 jobs lost

A Tewkesbury printing firm is to close with the loss of 170 jobs. The administrators said the economic downturn had led to difficulties and recent cancellation of a major printing contract was partly to blame for the decision to shut the company. **(19/01/09, BBC News)**

Bernard Matthews axes 130 jobs

Turkey producer Bernard Matthews has announced plans to axe 130 jobs in Norfolk. The firm, based in Great Witchingham, said the proposed loss of 35 administrative positions and 95 processing posts was down to the challenging economic climate. **(15/01/09, Todmorden News)**

Car giant Jaguar Land Rover axes 450 jobs

Warwickshire-based Jaguar Land Rover is to axe 450 jobs, including 300 managers. Managers will not receive bonuses this year, while pay rises have been deferred to October. The firm, based in Gaydon, with plants in Coventry, Solihull, Castle Bromwich and Halewood has 15,000 employees. **(15/01/09, Harrogate Advertiser)**

40 jobs lost at book printers

West Wiltshire publishing firm Cromwell Press has gone into administration. The company, which employs 63 people and is based in Trowbridge, has made 40 redundant. One employee said workers were bitter after they gave up a month's pay in August to help the company. (14/01/09, **Wiltshire Times & Chippenham News**)

More RG Carter jobs go

The downturn in construction will see 60 more jobs lost in the RG Carter building empire. A 30-day consultation with staff is underway at Fisher & Son at Fakenham and H Bullen & Son in Cromer – both arms of the Carter group and two of the oldest names in the Norfolk building industry. This follows the loss of 96 jobs at RG Carter's Drayton head office at the end of last year. (14/01/09, **Norwich Evening News**)

Jobs to go at food producer

Fakenham based vegetarian food producer Linda McCartney announced 17 jobs could be lost in manufacturing cutbacks. As well as redundancies, reorganisation could hit wage packets of the remaining workers as shifts are cut. (14/01/09, **Norwich Evening News**)

Half quarry workforce face redundancy

Half of the workforce at Shap quarry could lose their jobs. Workers at Shap Beck Quarry, which supplies lime to the steel industry, have been told that they could be made redundant if steel producer, Corus, ends their contract. (14/01/09, **The Westmorland Gazette**)

Lancashire theme park call in receivers

More than 100 jobs are under threat after a Lancashire theme park was placed into receivership. Camelot Theme Park and Park Hall Hotel in Charnock Richard near Chorley, is operated by Prime Resorts and employs 101 permanent staff. 29 jobs will go across both businesses – following 18 staff axed last month. The 140-room hotel, which employs around 80 people, will continue to trade while a buyer is sought. (03/01/09, **Lancashire Evening Post**)

Housing – Bad News

Housing trust falls victim to downturn

The Rural Housing Trust is to stop building affordable rural homes. Widely viewed as England's leading developer of small rural affordable housing schemes, the trust has helped to build 3,000 homes across 350 developments. But the credit crunch has seen landlords reluctant to buy properties. RHT Development, the trust's development business, will be wound up once current schemes are finished. "We relied on housing associations to get funding which are feeling the force of the climate," a trust spokeswoman said. Demand for shared ownership was still high but housing associations were being put off by low mortgage availability and other financial pressures. (19/01/09, **Rural Services Network Online**)

Trust closure: Branscombe homes threat

Affordable housing in Branscombe is under threat after the trust behind the scheme folded. The Rural Housing Trust which was identifying sites in Branscombe, Colyton and Kilmington announced last week that it has been forced to wind down activity. Mike Green, district councillor for Beer and Branscombe, said: "I am shortly to have a meeting with an alternative provider and am informed that there may be another provider interested to take up the project to help provide Branscombe with social housing. I am reasonably optimistic that we can find a way forward." (30/01/09, **Sidmouth Herald**)

Slump in number of planning applications

Builders, architects and councils are feeling the pinch as the number of planning applications slumps. All eight of the district councils in Norfolk, and Waveney in north Suffolk, have reported a drop in the number of applications submitted in 2008 – with the majority seeing a fall of between 10 and 17 per cent compared with 2007. (09/01/09, **Norwich Evening News**)

New figures highlight housing slowdown

The number of new homes being built in Norfolk has plummeted in the past year. New figures come at a time when housing should be growing in line with the Government's ambitious target of bringing thousands more people and jobs to the county in the next two decades. The good news is that negotiations are going on to buy up unsold housing stock to be used as social housing. (28/12/08, **Norwich Evening News**)

Housing – Support

Sling homes plan

Plans for housing in a village near Coleford look set for approval despite councillors' concerns. The scheme should bring £20,000 towards a bus route in Sling under a Section 106 agreement with developers, as well as provision of nine affordable homes. A West Dean Parish Council spokesman said: "The development appears to conflict with the Local Plan; development should be within the larger market towns where there are better services and infrastructure. The application proposes a fairly large development in a village which has virtually no services, particularly shopping and educational facilities. The Parish would have preferred a smaller development to provide for young people already living in the village." (09/02/09, **This is Gloucestershire**)

House building target 'needs to be cut'

House building targets in north Norfolk need to be cut because of a string of employment, environment and transport constraints in the area. About 400 new homes are currently being built across the district in a bid to meet a goal of 8,000 homes by 2021. A report to North Norfolk District Council's cabinet said officers recognised the urgent need for more affordable housing, but other factors meant that the new target should be lowered to another 330 a year. (09/02/09, **North Norfolk News**)

Homeowners offered equity loans

Homeowners in one of the most expensive areas of Yorkshire will be offered help to stop their houses being repossessed. Councils in the 'Golden Triangle' between Leeds, York and Harrogate have united to offer eligible owners an equity loan to pay off mortgage arrears and help to pay monthly instalments or reduce outstanding debt. The HomeSave Plus pilot scheme is expected to save up to 60 families from losing their homes in the next three months. (16/01/09, **Yorkshire Evening Post**)

Services

Tourist info centres face axe

Two tourist information centres (TICs) could be axed under cash-saving proposals being considered by South Lakeland District Council. Offices at Grange-over-Sands and Kirkby Lonsdale are being lined up for closure if councillors vote to reduce the authority's TIC budget by £60,000 next month. The cut is part of the council's package to find savings of £2.1 million in the next financial year. (30/01/09, **The Westmorland Gazette**)

Tourist Information Centres set for shake-up

Tourist Information Centres in West Dorset could be in for a shake-up. A report due to go before West Dorset district councillors next month will look at changing the way the centres are run in Dorchester, Bridport, Sherborne and Lyme Regis. The report suggests relocating offices to reduce rent charges while staying accessible to tourists. (20/01/09, **Dorset Echo**)

Closures' harmful impact on rural life

The full impact of post office closures in the countryside was revealed today. New figures show one in five branches in rural England has closed in the past eight years. Although more have closed in towns and cities where one in three had shut, the impact was more devastating in rural areas as villages lost their lifeline service. Since 2000, 1,385 branches in rural areas have shut. (23/01/09, **Yorkshire Post**)

Villages 'self help' guide

A new guide to get rural communities through the economic crisis has been launched. 'Strengthening Rural communities: Information, Advice and Support' has been produced by the Plunkett Foundation, a charity that aims to show rural villages how to help themselves through social enterprise. (19/01/09, **Prestwich & Whitefield Guide**)

Charity shops hit by drop in supply

Charity shops face a crisis as donations dry up. According to Adrienne Rostrun, retail services manager for the five Shakespeare Hospice stores, customer numbers are rising fast – with shoppers keen to hunt bargains – but donations are down.. (12/01/09, **Stratford Observer**)

Financial inclusion & employment support

Credit crunch hits Peak District economy

A report on the credit crunch impact in the Peak District has found serious problems with the National Park economy. East Midlands Development Agency's study claims farmers are suffering, employment levels are low and businesses in towns including Bakewell are struggling. Much of the Peak District is in the lowest quartile of all rural areas in terms of economic productivity as a result of the small size of farms and other businesses and the decline in traditional industries such as mining and forestry. (10/02/09, **Matlock Mercury**)

Credit crunch clinic in Caistor

Extra advice services are being made available in Caistor to help people through the credit crunch and financial crisis. Caistor effectively now gets a fortnightly free Citizens Advice Bureau Service. (28/01/09, **Boston Standard**)

Post offices can become money lenders

Post offices should become the UK's most high-profile bank with branches in towns and villages across the country, a think tank has recommended. Phillip Blond from Demos said it was 'madness' for branches to keep closing and called for the network to become a state-backed lender. The move would expand credit by giving the poorest access to money. The Post Office remained 'uncontaminated by toxic debt' and could provide the 'architecture' on which to build a parallel banking system. The suggestion came as a House of Commons committee continued its inquiry into the future of post offices, with ministers keen to explore how the remaining network can survive and expand. (27/01/09, **This is Plymouth**)

CAB rattling cans to ensure survival

A hard-pressed Castle Morpeth charity will be staging a street collection to raise vital funds for its work. The Borough's Citizens Advice Bureau has launched the desperate bid for help as it needs £70,000 a year to run its valuable services. It runs a main office in Morpeth and outreach services in nearby villages, operating open door sessions and a helpline number. (19/01/09, **Morpeth Herald**)

Council slashes Mole Valley CAB funds

Plans to cut-back funding for Mole Valley's Citizens Advice Bureaux have been described as devastating. Under the proposals Mole Valley District Council would slash funding to the two bureaux, in Dorking and Leatherhead, by about £22,000 over the next two years. The bureaux rely almost entirely on grants from Mole Valley. (16/01/09, **This is Surrey today**)

Key meeting to beat the credit crunch

Community groups are joining forces to support vulnerable residents. Selby District Citizens Advice Bureau and a range of other organisations have teamed up to help those at risk of unemployment, people facing difficulties servicing debt and those with extra financial pressures from rising bills. (12/01/09, **Selby Times**)

Job club opens doors

Residents facing redundancy were offered help today as a job club opened its doors for the first time.

Banbury Job Club offers advice on retraining and new careers as well as applications and benefits. Careers experts were on hand and plenty of job seekers turned up to see what was on offer. (30/01/09, Banbury Guardian)

Job Centre can help

The economic downturn has hit Whitby hard job losses at Europower and Woolworths. But Nicky Edmonds, manager of Whitby Job Centre, says there is an array of specialised and tailored help including lone parent advisers and disability employment advisers. Latest figures show 371 people claiming Jobseekers Allowance in Whitby in November and 102 vacancies listed that month. (20/01/09, Whitby Gazette)

Market Towns

Shopkeepers pull together to lure trade

Struggling traders are joining forces to try to lift Uttoxeter out of the doom and gloom. Around 30 shopkeepers are expected to attend the first-ever retail forum in the town next week in a bid to improve footfall. It has been organised by David Hunter, owner of Indulgence coffee lounge in the Lion Buildings, who is keen to promote the positive aspects of the town. (26/01/09, This is Staffordshire)

Fox's expansion 'pivotal' to market town

Plans to extend an ageing factory to safeguard and create hundreds of jobs have been recommended for approval – with a string of conditions. Uttoxeter's Fox Biscuits factory is in competition with a plant in Batley, Yorkshire, to be chosen by parent company Northern Foods as the location for a new £40 million supersite. It is expected that East Staffordshire Borough Council's planning committee will pass the blueprint with 28 provisos. The alternative would be closure within two years with the loss of 950 jobs. (13/02/09, Post Times)

Shop Local push extended into spring

A campaign to encourage support for Moorlands shops will continue. Business leaders in Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle want consumers to 'Shop Local' to boost the economy and protect independent businesses. The drive started at Christmas and will now continue into the spring with shop discounts, vouchers, reduced travel and loyalty schemes. (04/02/09, Stoke & Staffordshire News)

Retailers looking to buck the trend

Whitchurch had a good Christmas – defying bleak predictions for market towns. Many shops enjoyed good business in December and traders are starting a 'Use us or lose us' campaign to encourage people to shop locally. (15/01/09, Whitchurch Herald)

Closure of Evesham Public Hall looms

The closure of Evesham's Public Hall has moved a step closer following Wychavon District Council's decision to postpone work or reduce investment schemes worth more than £1.8 million. Councillors expressed "deep regret" at the proposal to mothball the hall but acknowledge that the £33,000 saving it would bring was much-needed during the current difficult times. (12/02/09, Evesham journal)

Another shop leaves town centre

The shop closure crisis in Evesham town centre continued this week. West Cornwall Pasty Company in Market Square became another victim of the downturn in the town. The decision comes despite the fact the company nationally is planning to open 15 new stores. (06/02/09, Evesham Observer)

New blow to town centre

Electrical retailer Currys is pulling out of Evesham. A spokesman said: "Regrettably, our store in Bridge Street will be closing in mid-March as part of an ongoing review of our high street store portfolio." (30/01/09, Evesham Observer)

Evesham shoe shops in trouble

Two shoe chains with stores in Evesham have gone into administration. Barratts and PriceLess called in administrators on Monday but their parent company, Bradford-based Stylo, is not in administration. Administrators said the stores on Evesham High Street will remain open and continue to trade. (27/01/09, **Evesham Journal**)

'Ghost town' fears as store set to close

News of the proposed closure of Marks & Spencer's Simply Food store in Evesham has been met with dismay in the town. Residents have expressed fears of Evesham becoming a ghost town as M&S could become the third retailer to shut up shop in the riverside Centre in a matter of weeks. (16/01/09, **Evesham Journal**)

Evesham store faces closure

Another Evesham retailer could close by Easter due to rising costs in rent. Homewares and furniture store Cargo started a six week consultation period with its six staff this week over its possible closure. The store's lease expired on Christmas Eve and it has not been able to reach a new agreement with the landlord, London-based Marbleland, who is insisting on increasing the rent by more than 50 per cent. (19/01/09, **Evesham Journal**)

Jobs saved by Evesham businessman

An Evesham businessman has saved eight jobs by taking staff on when they faced unemployment. Dave Loudoun, owner of Dave Loudon Cars in Evesham, has recruited all the staff who worked at Bredon Motors, which closed last week. Mr Loudon said: "It is a bit of good news for the Vale. We have taken over the official Peugeot service franchise for Evesham and the area so it means people can still get their cars serviced." (20/01/09, **Evesham Journal**)

Recession fightback has begun

Cash-stripped businesses in Evesham will be offered financial help by local councils to help them survive the tough economic conditions. The town council has agreed to join a scheme being set up by Evesham Market Town Partnership to provide financial support, which is expected to amount to £4,000 over two years. Wychavon District Council is also offering a £1,100 package to independent retailers in a bid to attract new firms to Evesham, Pershore and Broadway. (15/01/09, **Evesham Journal**)

Battle to survive: Kirkham

Another popular Kirkham shop closed last week. Owner Louise Fletcher shut Kirkham Sports with her lease at an end and her bills paid – getting out while she could – following a downturn in trade. Approximately a quarter of the shop units in the market town's high street are currently unoccupied following a series of closures of independent business. Chamber of Trade boss, Elaine Chambers said that despite this, the town is still full of independent shops and retains its own identity. (19/01/09, **Burnley Express**)

Cuts could take police off streets

Up to 20 police officers could be cut in Lancashire because of the recession and caps on council tax. Lancashire Police Authority says jobs could be lost as the force struggles to cope with a budget black hole of more than £1m. The Authority has written to Home Office ministers, warning of "a serious and detrimental impact on the policing service". (16/02/09, **Lancashire Evening Post**)

Traders plea to help shopping centre

Further calls to save shops from closure at St Martin's Walk, in Dorking, were made this week after yet another retailer pulled out of the beleaguered shopping centre. There are now 12 empty shops in St Martin's Walk – nearly half the total number of units there. Traders and shoppers have now called for urgent action to help prevent more outlets going under. (16/01/09, **This is Surrey Today**)

Local pubs

Pubs must diversify to survive

Pub owners are being urged to raise their game and offer community services if they want to survive. Suffolk County Council is urging rural pub owners to consider expanding their businesses – a cash boost of up to £5,000 is available under the Suffolk Rural Economy Scheme. The cash could help landlords diversify into services such as a grocery or newsagents to serve their local community. Dr Will Bidson, chief executive of Suffolk Acre, said: “We don’t want to see pubs close because they are vital to the wellbeing of village life.” (16/02/09, **Evening Star**)

New hope for reopening of Bempton pub

There is hope a village pub could soon be back in business. The White Horse in Bempton closed last month after the tenant left suddenly, leaving villagers concerned they would lose their only pub and focal point for the community. The White Horse had regularly hosted village events and fund-raising activities. (14/02/09, **Harrrogate Advertiser**)

‘Iconic’ coastal pub reopens

A man who has known a historic North Norfolk coastal pub for 50 years has now made it his own and given it a £100,000 re-vamp. Cliff Nye, 62, owner of the award-winning White Horse pub and restaurant at Brancaster Staithe, has now taken the lease on the Jolly Sailors, an 18th century free house pub in the same village. “Yes, we are bucking the trend at a time when pubs are closing down daily”. (12/02/09, **Fakenham & Wells Times**)

Figures show 39 pubs a week shut

Record numbers of pubs are closing every week in Britain, highlighting the “extreme” economic pressures facing the industry, new figures show. Every week 39 pubs are shutting, three more than last year, including 12 in rural areas, the British Beer and Pub Association said. (12/02/09, **Boston Standard**)

Fakenham pub to reopen

A couple hope to defy the financial gloom by reopening a historic pub in a market town hit by store closures and job cuts. Pete and Denise Nesbitt are opening the Oak Inn in Fakenham, which will create up to 20 jobs. It is a rare piece of positive news for the town which has recently lost its Woolworths store, and with major employers announcing earlier this month that job losses were expected at Linda McCartney Foods and building contractors Fisher and Sons. (26/01/09, **Edp24**)

Use your local, say campaigners

Nationally, pubs are closing down but Henry Mo has just taken over The Somerset in Marston. Mr Mo believes banks are making matters worse for pubs. He said that his bank seemed to have decided that pubs were a ‘no-go area’ for investment. An HSBC spokeswoman said she could not comment on individual cases, but that they were in support of business. HSBC created a new \$5bn global working capital fund for SMEs to ensure they continue to have access to appropriate credit through the current economic crisis. (24/12/08, **Oxford Times**)

Lune pub to host post office

A north Lancashire pub is to offer stamps and envelopes alongside the usual pints and peanuts when it takes on the role of the village post office this week. In a move that could be replicated elsewhere in the region, the Lunesdale Arms pub, in Tunstall, will begin hosting an outreach postal service on Thursday. (19/01/09, **Westmorland Gazette**)