



26 October 2006

Government's rural policy agency in negotiation to locate at Hartpury, Forest of Dean District in Gloucestershire, alongside new university research institute

The Commission for Rural Communities is in detailed negotiations to locate at Hartpury College, based in the Forest of Dean District in Gloucestershire.

It is proposed to construct a new building on the campus at Hartpury College, an associate faculty of the University of the West of England, linked to another building which will house a new rural policy institute set up jointly by Hartpury College, the University of Gloucestershire and the University of the West of England.

The Commission's role is to act as the main government agency for rural analysis and policy development, and in particular to act as watchdog, expert adviser and advocate on behalf of rural communities. Its Chairman, Dr Stuart Burgess, is also the Government's Rural Advocate and recently presented his first report to the Prime Minister.

The move to Hartpury, in the Forest of Dean, responds to a government commitment to relocate the Commissions London and Cheltenham staff and posts, in a rural area and one facing economic and other challenges. Following relocation, the Commission will maintain a small London presence in Whitehall.

The decision to go ahead with detailed negotiations on this relocation follows agreement by Barry Gardiner, Defra's Rural Affairs Minister, and is the result of an extensive exercise to evaluate alternative relocation options in economically lagging rural areas throughout England. This location provided the optimum balance of accessibility, cost, synergy with other activity, and a range of other criteria.

The intention now is to complete detailed negotiations so that the move can be completed by spring 2008 or earlier if possible.

Barry Gardiner, Rural Affairs Minister, commented: "I'm delighted to be able to announce that we are now in detailed negotiations to locate the Commission for Rural Communities at Hartpury. This meets our commitment to have a major focus for rural policy in an area that faces many of the challenges shared by many of the communities in rural England. We are very excited at the prospect of Hartpury becoming a powerhouse for the development of new approaches to the development of rural England in the 21st century. Its role in seeking out and testing best practice nationally and internationally will be central to this, as will its engagement with key delivery bodies, universities and research institutes throughout England. These are very important challenges and we look forward to close engagement in the months and years ahead."

Stuart Burgess, CRC Chairman and Rural Advocate said: "This important stage of development in our negotiations with Hartpury is a vital step towards developing the new organisation and ensuring that it has the capacities to meet its remit. We're particularly keen to develop our understanding, and the Government's, of rural needs across England and especially among people facing disadvantage and areas with particular economic challenges. We will continue to focus on understanding those needs and finding appropriate solutions in partnership within government, local communities and the numerous bodies charged with delivering public policy."

MORE

Malcolm Wharton, Principal of Hartpury College, said: "We are naturally delighted that the CRC is planning to locate onto the Campus. The presence of the Commission will further enhance Hartpury's role as a leading provider of rural education. I look forward to welcoming the Commission and the Rural Policy Institute to Hartpury".

John Hazelwood, Chairman of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council said: "I am delighted that the CRC is relocating to Hartpury College in the Forest of Dean. The Gloucestershire Rural Community Council has always maintained the closest links with both Hartpury and the University of Gloucestershire. We look forward to working even more closely with the CRC both locally and regionally."

Stan Jones, Managing Director of the Gloucestershire First welcomed the news on behalf of the County's Economic Partnership. "This announcement by the Commission will provide another centre of excellence. It recognises the outstanding role of Hartpury College as a provider of rural education and will also be an economic fillip for the Forest of Dean generally. The Forest of Dean is at the heart of our work with partner organisations to breathe new life into our rural communities throughout the county and we applaud the CRC's vote of confidence in Gloucestershire."

ENDS

Notes to Editor

For further information contact Joanne Ward on 07900 608030 or Katie Sharrock on 01242 534066 or 07900 608030.

1. The Commission for Rural Communities was established initially as an operating division of the Countryside Agency in April 2005, and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the NERC (The Natural Environment and Rural Communities) Act 2006. Our role is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage.

We have three key functions:

Rural advocate: the voice for rural people, businesses and communities

Expert adviser: giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others

Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally

2. The creation of Commission followed a major restructuring of government rural agencies including the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Service. The Commission began its work on 1st October 2006, was set up under the provisions of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and currently has staff in London and in Cheltenham.

3. Natural England are reviewing their accommodation requirements and expect to take decisions on the future of their cheltenham based staff in the next 6 months.

4. Further information about the Commission for Rural Communities and it's work can be found at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk