



# Sustainable Communities Act 2007: Draft regulations and statutory guidance

## Introduction

1. The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has the following three roles:
  - Listening to and representing the views of rural communities
  - Giving expert advice
  - Acting as an independent watchdog
2. Our job is to provide independent advice to government and others to make sure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

## Rural Proofing

3. We are keen to advise the Department of Communities and Local Government on the rural aspects of this consultation. In this context it is helpful to recall the Government's own commitment to 'Rural Proofing'. In its Rural White Paper<sup>1</sup>, the Government made a commitment to Rural Proofing as follows:

“Rural proofing means that as policy is developed and implemented policymakers should systematically:

  - Think about whether there will be any significant differential impacts in rural areas;
  - If there are such impacts assess what these might be;
  - Consider what adjustments/compensations might be made to fit rural circumstances.”
4. Rural proofing requires Government departments to think about the impacts of their policies on rural areas, its people, economies and environment. And then adjust these policies and their implementation to take account of rural circumstances, where this makes sense.
5. It is part of our job, in the CRC, to help advise Government departments and others on these rural proofing responsibilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruralwp/default.htm>

## **Our Key Points in Summary:**

6. Although we fully understand and accept that this guidance should be a 'light touch' to avoid unnecessary prescription and to allow decisions to be taken at the local level, we strongly believe that there should be an underlying principle, explicitly expressed within this guidance, that decisions to promote sustainable development in one community must demonstrate an adequate consideration of the potential for an adverse impact on the sustainable development of another.
7. We believe that there is no single model to achieve sustainable communities and yet we continue to see the predominance of an urban-focus to the promotion of 'sustainable communities' in England. It is somewhat paradoxical to pursue a policy objective to promote sustainable communities that might, as a direct consequence, result in many rural communities becoming less sustainable. This guidance should therefore address this point as a guiding principle.
8. On the subject of transferring powers from one public body to another we would be concerned to ensure that accountability is not diminished, for example, the potential transfer of powers to a public body without directly elected representatives. Naturally we would wish to ensure that rural communities were not unduly disadvantaged by any such transfer.

## **Concluding Remarks**

9. We would very much welcome the opportunity to work with CLG to develop the rural aspects of this and other guidance aimed at securing sustainable communities, to strengthen the guidance before finalisation, and perhaps jointly host with CLG and others such as the Sustainable Development Commission some workshops on the working of the new guidance, and to perhaps evaluate the impact on rural as well as urban areas at some future date.
10. We trust these brief comments are helpful to the preparation of the guidance and inform your work. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance to you.

**Chris Kolek**  
**Commission for Rural Communities**  
**9 May 2008**