



## Rural Advocate sets out the key issues for the future of rural England

The Government's Rural Advocate, Dr. Stuart Burgess, today publishes his first report setting out the concerns that rural people and businesses have raised with him about life in rural England.

Over the last two years, Dr Burgess has visited rural communities up and down the country, listening to their views about the issues that affect people living and working in rural England. Complementing his report is a more detailed piece of research from Ipsos MORI which includes a new survey on the views, concerns and priorities of rural people.

Commenting on his report and the survey, Dr Burgess said "Rural England is undergoing immense change. Last year over 105,00 more people moved from urban to rural areas than moved the other way. While the quality of life for the rural majority is good, there remains a sizeable minority whose lives are blighted by disadvantage, poverty and exclusion. This is a problem that is barely recognized and often not addressed"

Dr Burgess added "Too often rural life still is portrayed as the idyll so beloved of writers and painters from Wordsworth to Constable. This report has helped me piece together what I hope is a more realistic picture of rural life in the 21st century".

The report covers issues, such as housing, farming, social justice, rural business, access to services, community action and engagement. It highlights examples of good practice from around the country and demonstrates how communities and service-providers are addressing the challenges.

Commenting on his visits, Dr Burgess said "Rural England faces probably some of the most profound changes in its history. Against this backdrop I have been impressed by the capacity of rural people to respond to these challenges. There is a story of local enterprise, community strength and resilience, but also one of frustration against the constraints and barriers they feel hamper them and what they see as urban-centric decisions".

The report also sets out some of the issues facing rural communities in the future which Dr Burgess will give priority to over the next year. These include the challenge of sustainability and climate change, ensuring real participation in local decision making and the impact of large numbers of migrant workers on small rural settlements.

On the latter, Dr Burgess said "Many rural communities and businesses have benefited from the opportunities migrant workers offer. However, there are some challenges in terms of housing, low pay, access to services and the integration of large numbers of

people, often with English not their first language, within small or tight-knit host communities. There is a lot of good practice in those areas most affected and I shall be paying particular attention over the coming months to ensuring that the lessons are learned more widely”.

Accompanying the report is a MORI poll survey, 'Rural Insights', that asked rural and urban people and MPs to list their priorities for action. The poll found a broad range of priorities but a clear difference between the top ranking rural and urban priorities. The top rural priorities were public transport, facilities for teenagers and young children, road safety, shopping facilities and affordable decent housing. The poll also found that rural people, especially those living in smaller settlements and in sparsely populated areas, expressed little confidence in regional and national decision makers.

Dr Burgess said “The MORI poll findings reinforce what I heard on many of my visits that rural people feel increasingly disconnected from policies and decisions, which they see, rightly or wrongly, as designed to suit the urban majority. The challenge for all of us is to ensure that rural needs are better understood and to find new ways of really involving rural people and businesses in the decisions that affect their lives”.

ENDS

Notes for editors

1. The report and the MORI poll survey are available on the Commission for Rural Communities website [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk)
2. The Rural Advocate, Dr Stuart Burgess, was appointed by the Prime Minister. He is also chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities.
3. For further information please contact **Nick Milton** on **0207 932 5893** or **07900 608349** or Nick McClelland on 0207 932 5814/07900 608045
4. The Commission for Rural Communities was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the NERC Act 2006 (The Natural Environment and Rural Communities). 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