

RURAL Briefing

The pattern of changes in of land use in the countryside is accelerating. Political change too is present. National sustainable development and food and farming strategies are in place, a review of the Rural White Paper is in progress, Lord Haskins has completed his Review, and EU CAP reforms commence soon. Social and environmental pressures mount too: more space for transport, housing and infrastructure, more and better amenity use of land, improved environmental performance for biodiversity, wildlife and habitat as well as land better fitted for water quality and resource management. These and more comprise a new mix of imperatives.

Land Use issues now present a complex and opaque array - a challenge for policy makers and for those who manage land. To the extent that any strategic direction can be sustained at all it surely depends on two foundations

**A quest for clarity -
and securing of opportunities for the future?**

Responsible Use of Resources in Agriculture and on the Land

RURAL Briefing Number 14

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Briefings concentrate on the Policy Seminars which are the main business of the Society. These provide opportunity for in-depth discussion of important issues relating to agriculture and land use, as well as the wider food, farming and countryside policy. **Briefings** provide RURAL supporters and others with coverage of the policy issues examined and debated under the Society's arrangements, and which help to inform the policy development process and those close to and affected by it.

Briefing No 14 discusses the issues involved in the future pattern of land use in the managed countryside. The debate is important because of the rapid pace and extent of change in both the nature of the uses to which land may in future be put, and in the policy architecture which has governed most land based activity. What is involved, and what might the impacts be?

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TOWARDS LAND USE STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Background.

The patterns of land use in the British countryside have evolved as a response to the needs of the population and the contemporary economic, social and other priorities. Thus, as a largely agrarian society was succeeded by an industrial one, much land changed use or was 'developed'.

Today, an industrial society demands from land not only food production and space for economic activities and social infrastructure, but the satisfaction of many, more varied demands; for communications, access and amenity. In sum this amounts to a demand for 'ownership' of the determinants of land uses. Popular enthusiasm for the environmental integrity of land, with which it may have only an emotional connection, provides an obvious example. Similarly, as farming has developed so has the pattern of land use, notably in the direction of larger scale and more intensive production techniques.

Government policy has played a crucial role. The War Agriculture Committees of the 1940s and the Agriculture Acts of 1948, were followed by the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) from 1973. More recently, the emergence of Agri-Environment policy and successive reforms of the CAP have changed the incentives facing land users. Two other major areas of influence now prevail. First, the growing exposure to competition from third world countries as agriculture is brought into the disciplines of the WTO. Second, the impact of growing, and affluent population on lifestyle leading to demands for more land for housing, transport, social infrastructure, and for amenity use.

The current convergence of factors has led to a speed of change and pressures on society and policy that have rarely been equalled. It is the land managers on the ground who often experience most keenly the tensions implicit in this debate. Many now confront the most uncomfortable business choices since Victorian times. Policy makers, too, have uncomfortable choices to make about the nature and extent of policy interventions, the resolution of competing claims from interest groups, and the knowledge that the land is a finite national resource demanding long term guardianship.

The land use scene is already immensely complex. Looking further ahead the more opaque the view becomes.

Why did RURAL mount this seminar at this time?

It is generally agreed that the pace and extent of change in land use in the countryside is likely to accelerate in the coming years. In this context it is land in the managed rural landscape that will be affected. Policies that affect land use are changing equally rapidly. The forces bringing this about are, at first sight, mostly discrete issues, but, alone or in combination, all carry policy implications. Policy needs to develop if the sustainable food and farming strategy and other government objectives, eg for housing and water quality, are to be achieved.

The sheer scale and speed of events, is one of the most important characteristics of this changing scenario. It demands urgent responses. The UK is not fully the master of its own destiny in many of the issues because of commitments to the EU and other international agreements. Here it must argue its case but cannot, alone, control the outcome. Specific influences inside UK include:-

Planning and new approaches to sustainable development in the countryside, including developments in urban locations that create business opportunities and residential demand in rural locations.

Greater exposure to international market competition for agricultural, horticultural and forestry commodities, requiring substantial re-structuring of many land-based businesses.

Implementation of the Policy Commission Report by Sir Donald Curry.

Reform of the Common Agriculture Policy.

Publication of the Rural Delivery Review by Lord Haskins

Further development of agri-environment policy, including more environmentally benign or positively beneficial farming systems and further measures to protect and enhance natural resources; particularly biodiversity, landscape and habitat.

Land-based contributions to improved energy balance; energy crops; carbon.

New and alternative crops; new and alternative uses for existing crops.

The relationship between livestock production and environmental management.

Waste absorption and Mineral extraction.

Water quality, catchment, flood and coastal management.

Long term conservation of best and most versatile soils.

Social dimensions; land based people, and the wider popular demands from land.

Planning Questions. Planning policy is a perennial area for complaint. The system is widely held to be inadequate for the needs of rural communities or of land-based businesses. It impairs their ability to compete and stifles innovation. However, policy is moving rapidly. This is such a large topic that RURAL convened a Seminar in July 2003 to look specifically at **Land Use Planning in the Countryside**. A copy of the subsequent **RURAL Briefing No 13** is available on request or at

Development pressure. The demand for housing and infrastructure is creating unprecedented pressure on land adjacent to urban and sub/peri-urban areas. As a result some areas of better soil are threatened.

Agri-environment policy. This, arguably, is now moving towards securing more benign and beneficial farming systems. Codes of practice, entry level, and other schemes may assure better quality delivery. Much will depend upon how far this can be applied coherently to the totality of managed land, and harmonised with new uses of land.

Energy, Bio-energy and Renewable Raw Materials. Anxieties about climate change and the finite nature of fossil fuels make this a subject of mounting importance. Many who seek to promote development in this direction are impatient for positive policy signals. Substantial changes in land use could result. The scientific, environmental and commercial implications including new, alternative, and changed cropping regimes could be far reaching and need careful analysis.

The farmed landscape. Traditional crops, such as timber and the livestock have groomed much of UK's most treasured landscapes for generations. New regimes need to be properly integrated into overall sustainable development and food chain objectives. For example some commentators estimate that up to three million arable acres will no longer be competitive as a result of a reformed CAP.

Water. The effective management of water catchment zones both for the quantity and quality of the water and for the host landscapes are similarly urgent and major issues.

Wastes. Land can absorb some of the wastes of industrial society, but a rational system that sees waste as part of the total process and establishes appropriate values for its reclamation or disposal has yet to be devised. .

Comment.

Land use depends upon people, both individual managers and wider community based decisions. It is their activity that renders systems functional. Farmers are traditionally quick to respond to clear policy signals relating to production. However, the land, especially at the landscape level, is not amenable to rapid shifts of priority.

Given this background and a need to anticipate wider and more profound changes, it seems sensible to examine these issues and **seek improved understanding and communication** about potential strategies for future land use.

The quest for better understanding and improved communication

Many of the factors discussed so far are complex and opaque; linking them together adds to that opacity. Just as the questions have many dimensions, so there are likely to be multiple solutions. The extent of overlap and interdependence make clarity at once difficult and important. The pace of change and the sense of urgency that many farms are experiencing adds pressure. Yet clarification is essential to progress and policy custodians need a coherent view about "where we will be in ten years' time".

Government already has a Sustainable Development Strategy in place, and a programme in development to bring it to fruition. However this discussion exposes areas for debate about how the future well being of the physical landscape and the people who, directly and indirectly, depend upon it can be secured. Land Use is, after all a social construct – it is the outcome of human decisions and it affects everyone in the community.

The “future well-being” envisaged in this context is one in which much will change as society makes new demands, as opportunities and technologies are exploited and as responses to economic, social and environmental pressures are devised. **In short this is a time for new thinking about the uses to which land is put?**

Strategy and the current policy overlay.

Government has some 20 strategies relevant to DEFRA which therefore may affect land use. Interest groups with strongly articulated views and very mixed aspirations maintain regular political pressure, creating a climate of constant change. Government has to meet its responsibility to current and future generations by balancing risks and the interests of contending groups.

Current concerns include the implementation of CAP reform and the wider needs of rural communities. These are being discussed in the light of recommendations from both the Curry and Haskins reports¹. There now exist both opportunities and threats. For example, CAP reform may reduce stocking density problems in upland grazing areas but yet risk some land abandonment. The Haskins approach to create integrated and more regionally based policy application is intended to offer more sensitive and better value local delivery. It offers the prospect - if only dimly at this stage - of better integration of community and land managers needs. However it may also result in greater uncertainty, ‘post-code’ differentiation in the application of policy and added, if diffused administrative cost.

The use of national soil resources goes beyond farming. For example, a decision to allow land to revert to flood plain or to accept coastal retreat rather than create sea defences, will result in very different land uses, even if it remains in farming. The management of land as a water catchment area is likely to be very different as has become noticeable in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones.

The geological, mineral and biological make-up of soil may have important implications for policy. However, our concept of “best and most versatile soils” is at best a fairly crude valuation-grade-based system, designed primarily for planning purposes. It does not encourage particular types of use. This does not provide a system of classification that can enable regulations and incentives to be based on a scientific analysis of potential productivity or environmental value. This gap limits our ability to include timber and forests in policy thinking despite the fact that tree cover plays a critical role in “fully functioning” landscapes, and in optimising future uses of soils.

Our micro-biological knowledge is also incomplete. Soils contain many “invisible” interactive components, bacteria, insects and structure. We do not know the longer run effects of alternative management systems although these issues are important in designing policy. Our knowledge of soils and water relationships is also far from complete. Put simply, not enough is known about microbial activity in soils to make long term decisions about positive husbandry methods or the reversal of negative ones. We do not have the data at the micro-level for a strategy based on a scientific analysis of soils. These gaps need to be filled.

As local authorities seek to satisfy needs, for housing transport and infrastructure they are constrained by the differing values attached to land. In real terms the cost of motoring has fallen. Thus demand for houses and for road space for daily travel-to-work rises. However the external costs associated with this changed pattern of demand fall on the community rather than the individual. These include, for example, road congestion, the decline of village shops and added stress on local medical, educational and policing services. This discontinuity between private and social cost distorts the economics of creating sustainable rural communities. The political will to address these issues locally appears not to be in evidence.

In suburban, small town and village settings the frequency of requirements that developers should include socially valuable and affordable housing as a proportion of development has increased largely as a result of local initiatives rather than government policy. Quality varies across local authorities, but some have delivered very good results. This suggests that community involvement in the planning of development can play a positive role in land use issues. The same approach can be extended to a range of other land use issues including issues arising on a multi-parish scale that need resolution if fully functioning, yet differentiated landscapes are to be established.

This approach responds to what has been described as a British empathy with the “spirituality of land”. It is in tune with survey results showing that the majority of the population like the countryside just the way it is - even if they do not use it or visit it very infrequently. Even many who never do either still believe in its value. These

¹ Farming and Food a Sustainable Future – Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food – Chairman Sir Donald Curry
Rural Delivery Review A report on the delivery of government policies in rural England Christopher Haskins (October 2003)

non-material values matter a great deal at national, regional and local policy levels. They imply that land carries values beyond those of the local businesses and communities, not only in areas such as national parks, but in generic un-designated areas where strong senses of local identity remain even among those who have no economic dependency upon the land. Amenity extends beyond mere “use” and these non-material values mean that radical changes of land use often become issues of conflict.

Farmers need to run their businesses in a manner that respects these spiritual values. Faced by increased international competition this becomes harder to achieve. The national mood and current policy demand a high duty of land care, but many existing farm businesses may no longer be viable under these conditions. It is sometimes claimed that shifting CAP funding away from production towards environmental benefit will secure the right outcomes. This proposition is faulty on at least two counts.

First, the range of schemes on offer cannot secure the variety and extent of outcomes desired over the whole area farmed. In many situations optimum land uses have not yet been identified and even where they are we lack the administrative structures that would be needed to deliver. Second, almost every informed commentator believes that the public would not be willing to fund all the ‘public goods’ desired, even if there existed an objective method of valuing them. Indeed if policies sought to fund on this scale public goodwill towards the environment might well fall.

Thus wider public involvement in any strategy for land use seems both inevitable and essential, but it is far from straightforward. We appear to have the luxury of choice, the ability and wealth to choose, for example, amenity over food production for an increasing proportion of land and we appear to know a lot about our social wants and needs. However we are also apparently baffled by the difficulty of the choices on offer. We are already uncertain about what is the direction of improvement, the balance between desired but mutually exclusive goals. At this level the critical questions become ‘who are “we”?’ and what do “we” want?

The reformed CAP will deliver less income for commodity production. Where public goods have been a by-product of production process these may no longer be produced. Land managers, including farmers will have to decide what they do against a new commercial set of imperatives. If people demand land uses that are not commercial, then these will only come about if there is an appropriate mix of regulation, incentive and reward. Farmers traditionally have a deep reverence for their land and a willingness to respond to policy signals, but they have to be convinced that policies are soundly based and efficiently administered. Such policies must be based on a proper scientific basis.

This array of factors: public affinity with land, past and current investment in land use, commercial pressures and changed policies create new opportunities for farmers and policy makers. Identifying the choices available and establishing a rational basis to determine outcomes point this debate towards the need for an articulate strategy. Pragmatically, a strategy can begin with clear simple but major policy objectives, for example, the conservation of natural resources - soil water, air, and biodiversity, and these should reflect EU as well as UK national targets. However, to deliver the required results on the ground, these need to be expressed in terms of locally achievable, perhaps locally derived specific outcomes. It is arguable that this process should be more ‘upwardly’ driven than ‘downwards’ from central government policy. Notions such as fully functional landscapes, healthy and prosperous agriculture, and conservation of some resources can perhaps only be defined on the ground. Meshing conflicting concerns becomes a matter for local collaboration and application, determining priorities for land use has to take account of those most sensitised to the needs and those whose livelihoods depend on the land. Costs are involved and choices to have to be made about who bears them.

The process of choice is not simple. Just as the practical land use influences are complex and uncertain. We do not know what changes will occur in the demands placed on rural land by economic growth. We cannot be certain about how far the industry will ‘restructure’ or who will be the key commercial decision takers ten years ahead. The shape of policy within the EU and the WTO is likely to change significantly within a decade. All this makes it difficult to determine what outcomes are possible, let alone which are to be preferred? There are serious concerns about relying on the “vision of experts”, and a clear acceptance of a need to engage with the public. However, those who claim to speak on behalf of the public, politicians and pressure groups, are not “the public”.

Public trust is hard won. Recent experience, during which there has been a great deal of consultation has demonstrated the difficulty of evaluating the diverse responses received. Unsurprisingly, it has demonstrated that the closure of public debate on agreed terms is not always (or often) possible. Responsibility for decisions has to rest with government. Partnerships and co-operation are essential, even if difficult but the final responsibility must remain with government itself. Micro management of land and its use is not the function of policy. Scale matters; Scotland, with a smaller population than England appears to manage some partnerships better. Time, space and trust and common interests matter; for example the Voluntary Initiative on pesticides, although having a difficult gestation period, looks set to be a better tool than legislation to deal with over-use of agro-chemical inputs. There is a distinct feeling is that this model could be used in other settings.

The provision of advice is also regarded as better as well as cheaper than enforcement, The England Rural Development Plan (ERDP) has shown that facilitation pays - required outcomes can be delivered. Farm accreditation schemes too have a part to play. These approaches harness the sense of vocation of those involved locally, including elected representatives and entrepreneurs. Sometimes, apparently unholy alliances can work too, as demonstrated by Surfers Against Sewage initially militant stance against water companies now proving to be constructive. These examples illustrate that public opinion can change quite quickly. Capturing such possibilities means a move away from a heavy reliance on regulation. This too is a strategic choice.

Profound changes are now in view for the farmed area. The dairy sector is under pressure with no prospect of relief. Large acreages may cease arable production according to some predictions of the impact of CAP Reform. Some land will no longer be viable in farming. Those that continue to farm will still need substantial capital, which demands a return on the investment. In some areas new possibilities are emerging, for example industrial and energy crops and plant based renewable raw materials (RRM) might come to occupy a significant area of land and some forecasts envisage a trebling of the use of bio-based materials in within the next ten years. At this stage neither the market nor policy provide the necessary incentive for farmers to commit themselves to large scale investment. Britain, it seems trails behind other nations. Strategic support, especially if it extended to local/on farm processing, could create more jobs in the countryside helping to maintain the skills base of the rural community to assist in other functions. However it seems paradoxical to be suggesting 'subsidy' for a 'new' product, just at the time policy is seeking to remove commodity subsidies.

Similar considerations apply to the development of a large number of relatively small-scale operations to create and consume bio-fuel. A significant contribution to energy supply requires the planned integration of the commercial components of the system; the crops, the communications, processing and consumption infrastructure. Presently, too many obstacles interfere, notably NIMBY reactions to planning applications of even modest scale. Obstacles of this nature impede other operations that farms could integrate with farming, but which are too rarely exploited, for example waste management and the large-scale composting of green wastes. At present, wastes often travel many miles to scarce local authority amenity sites. This obscures, indeed ignores the potential for agriculture to exploit land use flexibility in a manner that could benefit the wider community

The impact of world markets under a reformed CAP together with further WTO moves to free trade will provide part of the boundary conditions for continued farming in the UK. One strategic choice would be to regard farming as the most cost-effective way to manage landscape, and to pay farmers to do that, regarding commodity sales as a by-product. This recognises the threats associated with freer trade but allows continued intervention to support public goods. There could be some downstream benefits. Marginal land may no longer support livestock operations on which some of the most treasured areas depend, downstream processing activities may have no role if this ceases. The result could be the loss of quite large regional food chain systems as well as the failure of land management to maintain public goods. The loss of this activity could have consequences for community services and social infrastructure. Schools, shops and public transport are already at risk because there is insufficient business to cover their overheads.

An alternative strategy could be based on the view that for some upland areas non-intervention would produce a strategically "optimum" land use. –This might be called terrestrial managed retreat. Defending the status quo involves a great deal of time, effort and expense. It is not unthinkable that some upland should be allowed to regenerate. Some benefits are immediately obvious, they include social, economic and environmental elements. Such a strategy would need to give full consideration to the significantly uncomfortable change this would involve for many farmers and rural people. This is difficult institutionally, economically and politically because so much 'emotional capital' is invested in the status quo. In the 1930s when similar effects arose autonomously this was associated with great hardship. Today there is an opportunity to manage change rather than see it gradually and remorselessly lead to the breakdown of the status quo. That, just as much as a policy of retaining farms to manage the landscape, involves both a political and an economic cost. .

If a strategy for land use is to be possible it is clear from this seminar that it must reflect the diversity of situations and opinions existing within the UK. It would need to integrate a wide range of ideas, some of which are articulated above. It would also need to be complementary to other policies notably the Sustainable Development Strategy, those for Food and Farming, for Animal Health and for Rural Development. Land use policy must also take account of how it is to be delivered. The principle of policy design and delivery separation recommended by Lord Haskins in his Review of Rural Delivery, has already been generally accepted by Government. Thus policy delivery will become the responsibility of a new integrated agency (NIA). The participants in this seminar saw this as an opportunity.

The era of a new integrated agency.

It is not co-incidental that debate about Government priorities and the Haskins Review (HR) are running together. DEFRA continues to develop its role as a department for the whole environment. Under this remit it

must run the Sustainable Food and Farming and Animal Health strategies and develop Rural Development services. Among its highest priorities is the protection of natural resources for the benefit of future generations. The resources are Soils, Water, Air, Genetic Combinations (usually expressed as species or biodiversity, and Cultural artefacts (or what is often thought of as the archaeological, vernacular or landscape heritage). There is no intention to downgrade biodiversity - this is a 'must-have' - but to look at the issues underpinning these. The design and work of the NIA is to mesh-in fully with work on sustainable development. This recognises that the policy world has become more complex and so needs more specialists; that some social and economic issues may be better dealt with at local or regional level, and that environmental issues need a specialist body, which must work with others.

The relationship of the NIA with the Environment Agency (EA) needs to be worked out, because the EA is a regulator, adviser, and grant-giver, roles which HR sees as inherently in conflict and thus in need of organisational separation. Participants in this seminar were not convinced, however that, on land use issues, such a separation was always necessary or desirable. Experience has shown that separating advice from regulation and incentive often leads to unnecessary misunderstanding and conflict. Some participants drew attention to the dangers of tinkering with structures that work.

The early history of the antecedents to the EA and HSE also demonstrated the worth of the regulator working with the grain of the problems on the ground, by using advice, guidance from those within the industry and developing mutual confidence, rather than acting solely as an enforcement entity. The Forestry Commission has shown how grant aid and regulation can exist in one organisation; it is a 'one-stop-shop'. There is a need to determine how to make this approach work with NIA ideals. In relation to the management of water supplies, a crucial requirement is a 'joined-up' regulatory capability and efficient analysis and administration. There was considerable uncertainty about how the NIA delivery work would fit with local development frameworks and a plea that "shared tools" should be used to deal with land use issues.

Government can only articulate policy in general terms, but delivery has to be through specific mechanisms and institutions. These tend to become 'silos'. The participants emphasised the need for joined-up land use planning and for this to fit within an overall coherence of policy covering all areas affecting rural land use. Much would depend on how land use changes and directs attention to the drivers of this change process.

Drivers for change

The principal underlying driver stems from modern society. Economic growth ensures that there is a great deal of private wealth competing for land. Mobility and the pervasive influence of television lead to an increasing tendency to sub-urbanise the countryside. These changes send in new signals to markets and to the political system. With them has come polarisation within and between sectors of agriculture, and between agriculture and wider society. The unintended consequences of the taxation and planning systems have led to a distortion of land values

In terms of land use the immediate drivers are economic. Changes in the CAP and further liberalisation of trade as a result of WTO agreements will alter the most profitable pattern of land management. New patterns of consumption, new technologies in production and changes within the food chain will provide further compelling incentives for farmers to reconfigure their businesses.

New markets may develop. RRM, for example, could expand rapidly given a favourable combination of policy and market conditions and business reaction. Up to 33 percent of the market in specialised oils and lubricants, some 5 million tons in Europe, could be derived from plants within ten years. Other opportunities include markets for polymer replacements and bio-degradable packaging.

Policy signals can create markets or provide a final marginal 'push' to make an emergent industrial opportunity viable. Inappropriate policy signals can equally result in surplus, waste, trade distortion, lost opportunities and the misuse of all resources, including land, as the recent history of the CAP demonstrates all too clearly.

Global warming is often mentioned as a major driver., but its effects are more likely to be mediated through policy decisions than the direct impact of changes in the climate. For example the Kyoto commitment to reduce carbon dioxide is likely to spawn more initiatives on renewables and the recycling and reduction of carbon emissions. The form, extent and timing of such changes is uncertain.

Public expenditure plays a major role in some land uses. The change of policy towards sea defences and adoption of 'managed retreat' provide a dramatic illustration. Demands for catchment management and other large-scale environmental objectives that require changes in land use may greatly increase the area dependent on public expenditure decisions. Growing housing and water demand creates a need for several reservoirs in the South of England. A more 'affluent' population will seek more and better leisure space, better roads and electronic communication systems to facilitate both work and leisure activities. Increased private incomes will

also lead to more waste, creating demands for land-fill and waste management and an increased potential to use waste in energy generation.

Participants in the seminar commented on an apparent lack of integration of policy. DTI shows no commitment to energy crops, but appears to be promoting both offshore and on-shore wind generation. Thus, it was argued, subsidies based on the need to generate energy with low carbon emissions was damaging other natural resources. There was no sign that there had been a systematic analysis of the trade-offs between wind generation and other forms of 'green' energy.

Policy has to be based on our 'best understanding' of the interactions between physical, biological and social variables. The importance of effective integration and communication by research bodies was stressed. An important element in this was the confidence of the public and politicians in the scientific advice they received.

Repeated references were made to the need for a multi-functional approach to land management. Land in food production is no longer just that. The farmer representatives in this debate fully welcomed moves to multi-functional businesses - there is not, in general, any attitudinal reluctance about this and there is an equally clear acceptance of the need to deliver those environmental and other positive outcomes which public funding rewards. But these businesses need clear and clearly integrated policy signals in order to plan, invest, manage, compete in markets, and secure a return on that investment sufficient to reward the highly skilled manpower which this changing scenario now demands.

The large area of land already 'owned by the public' - eg the Forestry Commission, National Parks, National Trust and others presents a special case. These organisations are able to demonstrate a different kind of flexibility from other businesses, often because of their manpower assets and their special status. They have special responsibility and opportunities for the management of this large area of land.

Given that these are just some of the elements in the impetus for change what should be the priorities for the New Integrated Agency?

Priorities for the New Integrated Agency

The first priority is protection of natural resources. This requires mediation between conflicting demands for access and recreation, landscape and biodiversity, and the productive potential of land, for food production and other uses. The Agency will need to react to the drivers mentioned above, to set targets, and to measure its success in achieving them.

The reform of the CAP requires a clear vision of what is now wanted from the land and the design of policy to encourage land managers to deliver what is required. The Rural Development, Agri-Environment and Single Payments and other schemes will all require to be integrated and orchestrated towards the achievement of these major policy objectives. Specialist advice such as that from English Nature, the Environment and Countryside Agencies and the research base is likely to play a crucial role. This will require appropriate institutional and administrative structures. What will be completely new, if the advice of Lord Haskins Review is adopted, is the extent to which these systems are satisfactorily and efficiently regionalised. There may exist yet a further need for integration with regional plans emanating from ODPM as part of the current round of changes to the planning system.

Water policy provides an example of how the national policy / local delivery split of responsibility might work. The EA will decide what criteria need to be met, for example under the EU Water Framework Directive - but the NIA (or whatever it is by then called) will determine what needs to be done within any particular land area. How this is to be integrated with existing schemes, legislative requirements and regional spatial strategies remains to be worked out. The end product has to be locally achievable solutions. Unsurprisingly, within the seminar there was much use of the national strategy and local tactics analogy, and some reservations about 'Goliath's aspirations for local delivery by David'

This focused attention on partnership issues. It was keenly felt that existing partnerships that work should be retained in the new systems. Specialist advice was as important on the ground as at policy level, especially for objectives which are ecologically based. Dangers existed in "chopping and changing" to the detriment of those positive schemes which are currently successful. It was also noted that much land use and essential character is the result of long established and engrained operations determined by the requirements of the farmer and his markets, and less by consideration of their effect on the land.

Concern was expressed about the method of organisational design for the NIA. Government's formal response to the Review is not due for some time but it already clear that the broad principles are accepted. This is enough to create widespread uncertainty, and requests for further information are already surfacing. So a priority for those engaged in the design process must be to conduct their work so as to minimise disruption and needless

speculation about transition and many other issues which bear on the well being of those who will be the agents of delivery and the ultimate customers. One suggestion was that the design process should be secret - so that at least everyone would be spared the arguments along the way !

These anxieties illustrate the starting point of this seminar: the quest for clarity. There is need to know what the 'tangibles' are. What is actually to be integrated? Is it the administration; is it the outcomes or objectives - bringing these together is very different and difficult; is it intended to combine the drivers, incentives, rewards and regulations; where does food production fit in: how does environmental quality fit with recreational opportunity; how might new forestry outcomes be reconciled with re-structuring of the forestry estate; are catchment plans enforceable given other objectives? These and similar questions abound and illustrate the range of issues that have to receive attention.

The development of policy and the actions of the NIA it was argued, need to avoid closing down options for the future. The national interest requires that such options and opportunities be enlarged. This is seen as an approach that should pervade the new the new system, *encouraging policy makers and the NIA to generate new options and enabling local partnerships and businesses to deliver from choices*. The value of a 'field force' of advice and guidance, especially on regulations and schemes, was again stressed, as was the importance of individual quality among local authorities and agency officers who advise on schemes at ground level.

The burden of regulation was also a concern and those present were reminded of Lord Haskins' earlier work on *Better Regulation*. This returned the debate to the theme of joined-up policy and it was recognised that it is impossible to join everything. Some frustrations will persist; many of these will be at local level and often because of local politics. However the mood among those present was that the NIA presents an important opportunity for simplification of the administrative processes affecting land use. The clear message from Lord Haskins is that "complex 19-node wiring diagrams of advice" for business plans simply have to go. However, the array of activity creates an inescapably complex task for any single organisation, and bringing together the functional lines at the point of action on the ground is clearly necessary. Perhaps the most compelling message for the designers of the new system is that the NIA will make a positive contribution to land use strategy if it adopts a "light on its feet, responsive style" and, through empowerment, allow those who are willing and able to do what needs to be done.

A Strategy for land use?

To the extent that a strategy is possible, it will need to include all the physical, social, economic and environmental factors in play. An understanding of the whole range of opportunities and hazards is a necessary basis for a durable and clear policy. This will have to take account of and arbitrate conflicts of views and ideology that are often passionately held in relation to questions of land use.

There exist many policies, and much public expenditure, with which land use needs to harmonise more satisfactorily. The Haskins report makes extensive recommendations on delivery organisation and method. However, this leaves unanswered questions about what purposes particular areas of land should serve, about how this unique and finite natural resource should be husbanded, or about how conflicting demands should be resolved, and essential changes managed.

There is also no guide as to where policy should **not** be involved. There is a need for a clear recognition of the limitations, cost and loss of personal welfare that policies can often involve. We do however know that a better job needs to be made of what is presently done - and, because so many elements are moving, unless we achieve the much needed greater clarity we will not manage change successfully.

To some extent two interactive debates are going on at once in this Briefing: one is about how the policy and administrative systems for land use achieve what they are supposed to do; the other is about the dynamics of a complex set of market stimuli and political reactions to these. The impact of these often defy analysis ahead of the events. However, within this mix the future of land use is being worked out.

It would be cowardly to avoid attempting analysis, and this event was a contribution to that process. It is hoped that it will aid, if not achieve, greater clarification.

Addendum

Seminar participants were invited at the end of the debate to state in under one minute their most significant point or points from this debate. The following is a synopsis of those points.

1. There are a fault lines in the period ahead while so much is going to change; it will be essential to ensure the right sort of culture is secured.
2. It is essential to focus on the process of integration.
3. The national framework for land use must be reflected in policy - but it is essential that room is left for local flexibility of response and application.
 - 4.1. It is important to test the policy and delivery model against the best of existing systems.
 - 4.2. Great care is needed in the transition phase; this does need to be properly designed.
5. A much more dynamic scenario is emerging - the emerging framework needs to be an enabling device.
6. Whatever the objective, we should achieve it through dismantling existing systems - eg CAP reform - or we just go on fiddling with structures.
 - 7.1. In land use strategy the catchments are the drivers.
 - 7.2. There is a need to get environmental understanding across the democracy and into the curriculum - political support is needed for this.
8. Experience suggests a profound distrust of politicians.
9. Political leadership is needed at several levels - spatial frameworks, administrative mechanisms, and in local settings.
10. We are not paying enough attention to the potential of plants to replace mineral oils.
11. The future is in shared frameworks. Local Authorities are critical to delivery in this scenario - but are all of them up to it?
 - 12.1. Conservation is the national direction of travel - with local management integrated at the micro level. We are pre-occupied with organisational changes - when what is required is change on the ground. Changing structures is not always the answer.
13. The building blocks for sound strategy for land use are made up of knowledge. More of this needs to be integrated across research bases - and across English, Scottish and Welsh borders.
 - 14.1. We need to work to define sensibly scaled areas - functioning landscapes - with special attention to the edges.
 - 14.2. We then should define the fine (pixel-sized) pieces - and that is when joined-up thinking is really necessary.
 - 14.3. Leadership and culture are of over-riding importance - and strong leadership is essential.
15. Making policy is an intergovernmental business. It is vital to make delivery comprehensible to those on the ground.
 - 16.1. How much more integration of regulation is required on one hand - and how much incentive and reward on the other?
 - 16.2. Help the regulatory burden by looking at the presence needed on the ground.
 - 16.3. Land use planning, and regional and spatial strategies need to be integrated.
 - 16.4. The NIA is about re-defining policy - and making changes.
17. Land managers need three things from policy: to be told clearly what is needed; to be trusted to do what is

wanted; and to be able to secure a reasonable reward for delivery.

Finally - one land manager's view of the scene ten years from now.

1. The number of farm businesses may be half that of to-day.
2. Much more free trade - and greater fluctuations in commodity prices.
3. UK balance of trade in food much worse.
4. Bio-fuels on 5% of the cropped areas.
5. Tighter rural planning controls.
6. Non-food crops industry still a fledgling.
7. Much more rigorous cross compliance associated with receipts from public funds - which will be substantially reduced anyway.
8. GM crops introduced under targeted management.
9. Public transport, particularly buses, further diminished in rural areas.
10. E-commerce substantial. Broadband (or its successor) more available.

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RURAL's FUTURE SEMINARS
will continue to examine policy themes central to the development of
policy for Farming, Food and Countryside.

In next issue:

Science and Agriculture - the way ahead?

See the next RURAL Briefing

RURAL plans to continue to programme events which capture this WAY AHEAD theme with the aim of promoting constructive input to the policy overlay beneath which farming food and countryside practitioners function.

Do you have views on these issues or indeed on other issues to which RURAL should turn its attention?

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