



Commission for
Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

High ground, high potential
– a future for England's
upland communities
Summary report

The Commission for Rural Communities acts as the advocate for England's rural communities, as an expert adviser to government, and as a watchdog to ensure that government actions, policies and programmes recognise and respond effectively to rural needs, with a particular focus on disadvantage.

It has 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, reporting on and seeking to mainstream rural into the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally

Key facts¹

- People – The uplands and upland fringes² cover 17% of England and are home to around 2 million people. There are proportionately fewer residents in the 20-34 age group and more in the 40+ age group than is average for England.
- Working communities – Manufacturing and the wholesale and retail trade are the dominant employers in the uplands (34%). Agriculture and forestry employ relatively few people (5.2%). However, agricultural businesses are the second most common, accounting for 16% of all businesses in the uplands. Sole trader businesses represent a much greater proportion (25%) of businesses than in England as a whole (16%).
- Recreation – There are 40 million visitors to England's upland National Parks each year spending £1.78 billion. At least 86% of open access³ land in England is in the uplands.
- Food, woodlands and water – 44% of total breeding ewes and 30% of beef cows in England are in the uplands. 25% of the total area of woodland is in the uplands and 70% of UK drinking water is sourced here.
- Climate change – At least 200 million tonnes of carbon are stored in peatlands in England's uplands.
- Landscapes and heritage – 75% of the uplands are designated as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).
- Biodiversity and natural features – More than half (53%) of England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are in the uplands.
- Land management – At least 82% of England's common land is in the uplands and approximately 16% of the uplands are managed as grouse moors.

¹ CRC (2009), State of the Countryside Update: Uplands, CRC Web 40, Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham; Harvey, D & Scott, C (2010), Farm Business Survey 2008/2009, Hill Farming in England, Rural Business Research, Newcastle University, Newcastle; MAGIC (2009); National Parks (2009) National Park facts and figures, www.nationalparks.gov.uk/learningabout/factsandfigures.htm, Natural England (2010), England's peatlands: carbon storage and greenhouse gases, NE 257, May 2010; Natural England (2009), Mapping values: the vital nature of our uplands – an atlas linking environment and people, NE 209 (SDA data); Natural England (2009), Open Access land, www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/openaccess/default.aspx.

² Throughout this report all references to 'uplands' data also include the upland fringes, defined as Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) unless otherwise stated.

³ Since 2005, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), the public can walk freely on mapped areas of mountain, moor, heath, downland and registered common land, without having to stick to paths.

Introduction

The English uplands are iconic landscapes that provide a wealth of natural and cultural assets. They have the potential to generate many valuable public goods and market products, supporting a low carbon future and green economy. Vibrant, secure upland communities hold the key to realising this potential.

We are in a period of global change, with rising food prices, an escalating world population and the possible impacts of climate change. These will place unprecedented demands on the land – to produce food and fuel, provide clean water, control flooding, and lock up carbon alongside other upland contributions.

In these circumstances, upland communities and economies must be equipped to realise their full potential and contribute to national prosperity now and in future. Our Inquiry has identified how this might happen.

There needs to be a fundamental shift in the way we look at the uplands. Rather than seeing them as areas of severe disadvantage – which in turn influences policy and its delivery – they should be considered as areas of significant environmental, cultural and social value and opportunity.

We are recommending a new national strategy, with visible leadership and empowerment at all levels driving genuinely integrated activity. With this approach creating the conditions for success, we set out levers for change that, taken together, can realise the potential of the uplands. In particular we focus on the great potential of the uplands to provide green and low carbon solutions to environmental issues, lead the way on developing green businesses, and demonstrate and promote the benefits of working with and making the most of the natural and cultural land assets.

This summary report provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities that upland communities face, along with potential solutions, as set out in our recommendations.

About the Inquiry

The aim of our Inquiry was ‘to identify and evaluate the drivers of change in upland communities, and to develop policy recommendations to enable and equip them to move towards more secure, economically prosperous and sustainable futures’.

The English uplands have been the subject of a plethora of research and reports that have highlighted the important part these areas play in providing public goods to the nation, particularly environmental benefits and biodiversity. Several government agencies have devised policy initiatives for the uplands. However, these tend to be narrowly focused on single policy aspects or sectors, rather than seeing them as part of a whole upland setting.

Our Inquiry adopted a fresh perspective – one that encompassed not just the policy and environmental aspects, but also the needs and circumstances of those living and working in the uplands, from their point of view. We recognised that this was a neglected dimension of the uplands situation and that what was required was an appreciation of the impacts of recent economic, social and policy changes, and the likely impact of future changes on these communities.

These changes include the major global issues of climate change and population growth and the consequent escalating demands for food, energy and water. As the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor John Beddington, puts it these create the potential for a 'perfect storm of global events'. There are also social and economic changes that are having considerable impacts on these areas.

We gathered and analysed evidence from a wide range of sources and heard first hand of the personal and professional experiences and perspectives of more than 200 people who live and work in the uplands.



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Our findings

People and communities

People are essential to the identity of the land and to its future. The landscape has been formed by centuries of human intervention and management and people remain essential to its future development.

During our Inquiry we found a strong culture of community cohesion. Many people are connected economically, socially and culturally to the land and to those who manage the land. This strong dynamic connection between land and communities is essential in realising the potential of the uplands.

Some people within the uplands play special roles as custodians and managers of land and the natural assets. Their skills and continued stewardship are vital to the delivery of the many highly valued public goods and market products that arise from the natural assets.

However, there are threats to this community cohesion, and to the sustainability of upland communities. We heard concerns about an ageing population and the loss of young people. While this picture is characteristic of most rural areas, we were told of particular issues around the loss of those with the knowledge and understanding of the uplands.

A major factor affecting retention and attraction of young people and families is the cost of housing. In common with many other rural areas, high demand from incomers to areas of landscape beauty, coupled with low supply, relatively lower local wages and restrictive planning arrangements mean that little housing is available for young people and those on low wages.

We also heard concerns about difficulties accessing services. As with other sparsely populated and geographically remote areas there has been a slow but steady decline in the number and range of services provided locally. There was clear recognition of the need for innovative and locally developed solutions to provision of public transport, education and health care.

We found evidence of a culture of initiative, enterprise and energy in business, with people developing new markets and using new technology. Many upland farming businesses and households have successfully diversified, including into non-farming enterprises and off-farm employment. This culture of initiative is demonstrated both by long-standing residents and in-migrants.

But enterprise is hampered by limited employment opportunities, as many upland economies are characterised by low wages and seasonal employment. We heard that some people need two or more jobs to earn a living wage.

We also heard recurrent concerns about the absence of a basic service infrastructure, often due to the remoteness of many upland communities. In particular, exclusion from mobile telecommunications and broadband services has a significant impact on the viability of many businesses.

Taken together these issues combine to challenge the sustainability of upland communities. Yet despite this, we found much evidence of local action and community spirit. Volunteer networks provide leadership, solve problems and provide services. These social entrepreneurs contribute to extraordinary levels of social capital in many upland communities. Local institutions and bodies such as churches continue to provide meeting points and places – the so-called social ‘glue’. This social interaction and community spirit remain central to the culture of the uplands, and provide the basis for much of the entrepreneurial activity and enterprise.



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The natural and cultural assets of the uplands

Throughout our Inquiry we were made very aware of just how much the English uplands are valued for their distinct and beautiful landscapes. This is indicated by the designation of most of the uplands as National Parks or AONBs, by the very high number of visitors they receive each year and by the number and membership of voluntary organisations that seek to conserve them.

Upland landscapes represent and contain important natural assets, which generate valuable public goods. Much of the uplands are already designated for their high biodiversity value, and are home to many rare species and wildlife habitats. A high percentage of drinking water is sourced from the uplands and the way uplands are managed has a strong influence on river flows and flood risks. Upland peatlands store at least 200 million tonnes of carbon according to Natural England.

The uplands also generate valuable market products and services: food and woodland products; fuel and energy; and tourism and recreation, including walking, outdoor adventure and game shooting.

Upland natural assets have both present value and future potential. There is scope, for example, to enhance upland biodiversity, sequester more carbon, supply more high-quality meat and specialist and distinctive foods, generate renewable energy, and provide recreational and tourism services that contribute to people’s health and well-being.



The importance of enhancing food security through a strong UK agriculture is recognised in Government's food strategy, Food 2030 and in 'The Coalition: our programme for government'. Farmers in the uplands play a special role in this respect, by breeding stock for finishing in the lowlands and by producing meat directly.

Upland landscapes are both natural and human. They are 'cultural landscapes', living history representing human intervention, human activity and values. They have been created by centuries of human endeavour, and are maintained by continued stewardship. Settlements and communities (including their knowledge, skills, customs and traditions as well as their buildings and structures) are as much a part of the content and character of upland landscapes as are hills and valleys, rivers and lakes.

The natural assets provide a wealth of opportunity and potential but are strongly dependent on good stewardship and effective land management practices. We heard that hill farmers and land managers are central not only to the community but also to the provision of valuable public goods, for which they are inadequately recognised.

Whilst we heard some positive stories from hill farmers, who through diversification and adaptation are running profitable businesses (often with the support of their National Park Authority), many hill farming businesses operate at the margins of financial viability, with low, or even negative, returns on labour and capital. Farm succession within families is also a commonly held concern.

There has been a marked reduction in livestock numbers as a result of de-coupling of support, the ravages of Foot and Mouth and the impact of de-stocking in response to the Single Farm Payment and to meet environmental requirements. Hill farmers currently rely heavily on the Single Farm Payment, agri-environment agreements and diversification to support their income. Many have become isolated, overwhelmed by bureaucracy and fearful for the future, particularly in relation to CAP reform and the impact on funding and their ability to continue farming and land management.

The perceived lower status of hill farming and minimal investment in relevant research, development and transfer of knowledge and skills is not consistent with the real value, contribution and potential of upland land management.

There are a number of threats to several of the valuable ecosystem services supplied by the uplands. Recent research indicates that carbon is being released into the atmosphere at a higher rate than previously thought. Brown water from peat soils is a growing problem in many places and a challenge to the provision of acceptable drinking water in the uplands. The uplands are also source areas for flooding, and inappropriate land management can appreciably increase flood risk. In the future, a warming climate, changes in precipitation or inappropriate management could convert peatlands from a carbon sink to a carbon source.

The greatest threat to these valuable assets, however, arises from a lack of recognition that these are embedded in social and economic systems – in other words, their sustainability is reliant on the sustainability of upland communities.



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Challenges facing policy and governance

The challenges currently facing upland places and communities are a result of the varying approach to policy development and implementation since the Second World War. This has resulted in often conflicting and unforeseen consequences.

The uplands demonstrate a complex assortment of needs and unfulfilled potential. The future of the public goods and benefits they provide is interlinked with the future prosperity and sustainability of upland communities. This interdependence requires a more holistic approach to policy and governance, and empowerment of the communities so they have a greater say in effective service delivery.

Lack of leadership or vision

Our Inquiry revealed dissatisfaction with the disjointed and sometimes confusing nature of current policies affecting upland areas and communities. We heard repeated concerns that policies for sustainable communities, housing, planning, economic development, and public service delivery demonstrate a lack of understanding of the needs of the uplands, and of what is required to make them more sustainable in the future. Policies were criticised as ‘top down’, sporadic, short-term interventions. The absence of a satisfactory strategic policy framework means that policy objectives are not currently working towards common goals or outcomes for England’s diverse upland communities and places.

Policy weaknesses

We summarise the problems with the existing policy approach as:

- Non-participatory – people in the uplands feel disempowered and distant from decisions; policy decisions are perceived as taking insufficient account of local knowledge.
- One-size-fits-all – policy is too centralised and unable to accommodate the complexity of the problems and the diversity of upland areas and communities. Policy is generally not customised to specific contexts or is unable to adapt to local conditions and needs.
- Fragmented – policy is broken up between numerous agencies and sectors within an assortment of different geographical and policy designations.
- Uninformed – current policy is all too often inadequately informed, either by local knowledge or by thorough, well-tested scientific knowledge.

What needs to happen? Setting the conditions for success

The English uplands are under-valued national assets that generate important public goods and market products. Society needs to intervene to secure assets, generate the public and private goods, and release greater potential, such as renewable energy, eco-tourism and food production.

At the same time it is important to recognise that although it is farmers and land managers who look after the assets and deliver the goods and services, many more people enable them to do so as part of the wider upland economy and society. The wider communities of which farmers and other land managers are a part must themselves be sustainable if those who provide public goods and benefits are to carry on this vital role.

To address the weaknesses and to set the conditions to realise the full potential of the uplands, we consider the following interlinked actions need to be taken:

1. Develop a new national strategy for the uplands. This should be informed by local knowledge and experience and should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the rich diversity of these areas. A strategy would provide a coherent framework so that upland people, businesses and communities can better understand what they need to do to play their part in protecting and enhancing the value of these important national assets.
2. Provide visible leadership at a national level to drive genuinely integrated activity across all of the government departments that have a role to play. This would also encourage and enable a more flexible, place-based approach to other governance structures to build leadership capacity focused on the specific circumstances of the uplands at a sub-regional and local level.
3. Support and empower upland communities so they have much more direct input into decisions that have an impact on their lives and businesses, and involve them in the design and delivery of the services that are essential to maintaining thriving upland communities.

It will require a fresh commitment from government departments, public bodies, local authorities and others to work together with communities and local leaders. We recognise that good practice already exists which demonstrates collaborative working and this should be built upon.

We also know that realising the full potential of England's uplands is not within the gift of one body and there is no single solution to this complex picture.

The new strategy should be:

- integrated – across sectors, administrative areas and departments;
- territorial – for the uplands, distinctive and appropriate to specific circumstances recognising diversity across upland areas;

- well-informed – using local and expert knowledge and, where appropriate, the outcomes of research and development;
- participatory – involving local people;
- incentivising – for those delivering public goods;
- investment focused – building a diversified economy based on the potential of the uplands and its communities.

It will succeed if it is integrated at all levels and recognises the diversity of each upland area: what is workable and appropriate for the Cumbrian uplands may well be different from what should be delivered in Exmoor or the Peak District. Actions taken at different governance levels should build on efforts that are already being made to achieve greater integration.

The Inquiry recognises the need for a multi layered approach to governance. We heard again and again that communities feel that they do not have a voice, and we strongly advocate that the communities should have a say in how any investment is carried out in their areas through more effective participation and empowerment. We recognise that elements of the 'Total Place' agenda rightly reflect the place making role of local authorities and support their engagement with communities and local leaders, and we recognise the important role of parish councils at this local level. At a wider spatial level we support the use of mechanisms such as Multi Area Agreements to work across current boundaries and designations which could advance community development in the uplands.

We also recognise that the commons management approach could provide a model for land management that emphasises collaborative and communal working.

This participatory approach should set the conditions for success and will respond to the different challenges and opportunities that arise from diverse rural areas.

Recommendations – setting the conditions for success

1: A new integrated strategy for the uplands

The Government should develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy for England's uplands, to protect and maximise the benefits derived from the valuable national assets these areas contain. The strategy should recognise that support and investment in thriving upland communities is critical to realising the full potential of these diverse areas.

2: Strengthening leadership and momentum

The Government should appoint an individual with lead responsibility for developing and ensuring effective implementation of the new uplands strategy. This individual should be accountable to Ministers of BIS, CLG, DECC and DEFRA.

3: Empowering communities in the uplands

3.1: CLG should take responsibility for ensuring that the recommendations of the CRC's Participation Inquiry (2008) are implemented, and in particular:

- ensure that both central and local government commit to supporting and acting upon very local community plans such as parish plans and market town plans;
- encourage local authorities to give neighbourhood budgets to local councillors for expenditure within their areas and for parish councillors to involve local residents more directly in spending decisions using participatory budgeting principles.

3.2: Relevant local authorities should be encouraged by CLG to pilot new approaches that enable local authorities and communities to work together in upland areas to agree objectives, allocate resources, and achieve strategic goals. One of the models which might be piloted in an upland area could be the Multi Area Agreement (MAA) or similar. And CLG should extend the scope of its Total Place pilots to an upland location, providing a valuable opportunity to explore both the potential for a more integrated, place-based approach to public sector provision, and the opportunities for strengthening voluntary, community and social enterprise activities in upland communities.

3.3: Defra should enhance the role and value of the National Park Authorities by increasing their statutory responsibilities to give equal priority and status to foster the economic and social well being of local communities alongside the existing statutory purposes set out in section 61 of the Environment Act 1995.

3.4: Local planning authorities should be required to demonstrate that they have given material consideration to properly constituted parish plans and other local consultative strategies.

These recommendations set out the conditions for success. This approach should facilitate real participation in how these hardworking and beautiful areas are managed in a joined up, locally sensitive way.

Building on this we now set out our levers for change that should help to realise the potential of the uplands.

Realising the potential: Levers for change

The English uplands contain a wealth of natural and cultural assets with the potential to generate many valuable public goods and market products for the nation, and support a low carbon future and the green economy.

Building on the conditions for success as set out above, we set out the main levers for change that will help develop sustainable communities and realise the potential of the uplands. There is a need for better integrated and targeted investment to improve infrastructure, support hill farmers and land managers, encourage innovation and economic potential, and build social capital and aspirations in contributing to a vibrant, wider upland society.

The levers are:

- public payment for public goods;
- a reformed, better targeted CAP;
- developing markets;
- a positive future for farming;
- pioneers of green business development;
- building capacity and raising aspirations;
- switching on the uplands – investment in communications infrastructure; and
- planning as an enabler for sustainable housing and business.

Public payment for public goods

Individual land managers need to be rewarded for the provision of public goods. Some of this will be achieved by developing markets (e.g. for carbon and water), but most public goods are not amenable to this. A sophisticated understanding, targeting and rewarding of public goods, and not just environmental ones, is therefore urgently needed. In the uplands we need to avoid the threats of depopulation and land abandonment. We need to harness the enormous benefits of managing habitats, and maintaining biodiversity and the cultural landscape – all to the good of the environment and the nation as a whole. So rewarding and incentivising land managers for maintaining and developing public goods and services is critically important and targeted CAP reform will be essential in making this happen.

A reformed CAP – communities and taxpayers benefitting from a better targeted CAP

CAP reform in 2013 and 2020 provides an opportunity to address the issues at a European and possibly national level. We recognise that there are many challenges, not least a likely reduction in budget, and with the growth in member states the number of farms expecting support could increase from 5 million to 15 million. We also recognise the opportunity that CAP reform gives to gain more targeted support for rewarding public goods, and more investment in the communities themselves.

It is important that support of UK hill farming and land managers and appropriate reward for the valuable, varied and wide ranging public goods generated is a key outcome of CAP reform.

Recommendations

4: A new approach to funding

4.1: Current funding mechanisms will not unlock the potential of the uplands and as part of the CAP reform in 2013 and 2020, Defra and its agencies (and the EU) should develop a new approach to rewarding farmers for managing national assets in harmony with developing businesses and market enterprises.

4.2: Defra should broaden its concept of 'income foregone' to include the full costs of the farmer staying in business, in line with some other EU countries.

4.3: To reflect the contribution of upland communities to public benefits, Defra should ensure that the menu of measures under axes 3 and 4 should be broadened to enhance investment in and support for social sustainability of communities in upland areas.

4.4: Delivery bodies with Less Favoured Areas within their jurisdiction should review the extent to which RDPE funding is sufficiently accessible to upland farms and rural businesses (especially those relating to enterprise investment and rural business support).⁴

Developing markets for carbon, water, woodland products and food

There is a need to sustain upland farming communities and culture more generally, and not just through direct payments for public goods. A greater diversity of markets for land-based products and services would contribute to this, and we believe there is potential to both expand existing markets and develop new ones, particularly in relation to carbon and water.

Recommendations

5: Developing markets for carbon and water

5.1: Defra should establish a long-term land management policy to mitigate carbon loss, particularly in relation to peatlands management. This policy should be informed by the knowledge and capacity that various research programmes have developed in this area.

5.2: DECC should set out the steps necessary to develop effective carbon markets and ensure that future reward for land carbon management comes through the market.

5.3: Defra and its agencies should use good practice (such as SCaMP and catchment sensitive farming) to develop models for public-private investment that secures multiple objectives in upland catchments, maintains water quality, reduces flood risk and potentially provides income for hill farmers and land managers.

⁴ Recommendation taken from evidence to the Inquiry from Chloe Palmer 'A future for hill farming' Nuffield Farming Scholarship Report, December 2009.

A positive future for farming

Even with a better targeted CAP, and developing markets, most upland farmers and land managers will depend on opportunities for off-farm employment and non-farming enterprise that are offered by a diversified wider economy (i.e. pluriactivity). Farmers and land managers both contribute to and need a vibrant wider upland society (e.g. for schools, healthcare and public services).

There is a positive future for hill farming, and there is a need for better coordinated research and development to highlight where scientific developments and local knowledge can combine to provide innovative and inspirational solutions. More generally there is a need to recognise and promote hill farming's essential role in delivering valuable goods and services.



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Recommendations

6: Securing the future for hill farming

6.1: Given the fundamental changes and the provisional budget allocations for the Upland Entry Level Scheme, Defra should review uptake and initial impacts of the scheme by 2012.

6.2: Decisions on stocking rates should be made locally to reflect the distinctive needs of each place, local climate and the balance of public goods appropriate for particular areas. We are recommending a rapid review of the policy and its effects – informed by whatever monitoring evidence and scientific evidence is now available – to understand more about what is happening on the ground.

6.3: Farming lead bodies, including NFU, TFA and CLA should work with Government to develop proposals, and facilitate good practice in ensuring the succession of upland farms.

6.4: In order to address the R & D deficit relating to sustainability of the uplands, Research Councils UK and other relevant stakeholders should target key themes and then build capacity through partnerships, pool scarce resources and facilitate greater knowledge transfer across relevant research projects.

6.5: At least one land-based college should use its hill farming resources to improve and promote apprenticeships, training, and livestock improvement and land management programmes. This should include field trial work and the development of learning materials for wider application.

6.6: RDPE funding should be used to develop a series of commercial demonstration farms to promote good practice across a range of disciplines including implementation of agri-environment schemes, soil and livestock management, alternative forage crops, stocking rates and grazing management regimes.

6.7: Because of the dependence on four wheel drive vehicles to carry out work in the difficult terrain of the uplands, we recommend that manufacturers and HMRC clarify and publicise the criteria for reduced taxation, including which vehicles qualify.

Pioneers of green business development

In terms of the wider economy we heard about exciting developments in the future business potential of renewable energy schemes, green business, new approaches to tourism, and the potential in providing and marketing local food and local products. In addition the benefits of new technologies mean that people may choose where they work, which means that entrepreneurs may develop their businesses without having to move to urban centres.

The challenges of climate change and food, energy and water security could, in fact, provide greater opportunities for economic activities in the uplands. This would be particularly so if opportunities were encouraged through more targeted business support and if the benefits accrued from green businesses and the use of renewable energy schemes could be enjoyed first and foremost by the communities themselves.



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Recommendations

7: Encouraging enterprise in new green growth areas

7.1: DECC and CLG should require local authorities to complete an audit of the opportunities for renewable energy to stimulate new enterprise and ensure opportunities for added value are not missed.

7.2: BIS should ensure that specialist advice to develop new green businesses and enterprise is available and accessible across England's uplands.

7.3: BIS and DECC should ensure that programmes and incentives are offered to local businesses and social entrepreneurs within upland communities and that the economic benefits are enjoyed first and foremost by the local communities.

7.4: In any future plans for afforestation in the uplands, the Forestry Commission should promote and demonstrate full consideration of local social and economic benefits.

Building capacity and raising aspirations

To retain and attract young people to the uplands is key to the future of vibrant, sustainable upland communities. Developing skills and knowledge and supporting local leadership is vital, but needs to be tailored to the special circumstances and value of the uplands. There is a need for greater support for new technologies and businesses which will provide opportunities for enterprise and employment to release the full economic potential within the uplands. Mentoring schemes, apprenticeships and local training will be important to helping people prepare for new opportunities.

There is also a need for better integration and recognition of the critically important role of the voluntary and community sector in building the capacity of, and delivering services to, upland communities. The "get on and do" attitude found in these groups needs to be built upon, using many of the existing, highly effective bodies and networks.

Recommendations

8: Raising aspirations: supporting development of communities

8.1: Cabinet Office should ensure that proper account is taken of the needs and potential of upland communities when developing and delivering the Government's Big Society Programme. In particular, the arrangements for the voluntary and community sector should be replaced with committed and reliable measures.

8.2: BIS should provide support to existing and emergent industries in the uplands, with advice, training programmes and knowledge sharing fora, focused on new and traditional skills and businesses, which reflect the business profile and potential of the uplands. Wherever possible this should be informed by

experience of living and working in the uplands. Mentoring schemes would be particularly important to encourage innovation and provide inspiration.

Switching on the uplands – investment in communications infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is also essential, in particular in broadband and mobile phone coverage, which remain undersupplied in many upland areas, and which will enable businesses to operate more effectively and efficiently. This infrastructure will also provide the vital social interaction needed by young people and families through social media, and service delivery (shopping, bill paying etc) and deliver the basic requirements of education, healthcare and government advice.

Recommendations

9: Improving broadband and mobile telephone communications

9.1: BIS and Defra (through Broadband Delivery UK) should support the development of creative solutions to deliver NGA (Next Generation Access) to upland areas, including support for more community broadband schemes, and promoting good practice.

9.2: BIS should agree a set of proposals with OFCOM to provide universal coverage of mobile phone services.

9.3: BIS should agree to use a framework agreement so that public investment (e.g. through schools) may be used to support better broadband connectivity and speed for local communities and businesses.

Planning as an enabler for sustainable housing and business

The planning system is a key enabler for sustainable community development in terms of facilitating business development, supporting sustainable affordable housing, and adopting measures to support adaptation to climate change. The National Parks are particularly important as planning authorities in the uplands, and they have a strong influence on land use and landscape. Their new vision sets out how they can contribute to fostering economic and social well being within upland communities. Generally, we would like to see planning authorities giving greater attention to, and taking action on community planning schemes and encouraging local participation in the planning process, building on local expertise and knowledge.

Recommendations

10: Planning to enable sustainable upland communities

CLG should:

- Give clear guidance that affordable housing and homes for 'live-work' are fundamental to the sustainability of upland communities and to their management of the cultural and natural heritage.
- Provide advice that makes clear to local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate that more affordable housing must be approved in the wider public interest, and ensure that development plans and housing strategies reflect this imperative.
- Ensure a greater role for communities in approving small schemes of affordable housing without formal planning consent where this need is established in parish plans.
- Encourage public bodies that own land in the uplands (e.g. Forestry Commission, National Parks, Ministry of Defence) to make sites available for affordable housing provision at low cost, where these can contribute toward meeting needs.
- Ensure that the HCA makes sufficient finance available to build affordable housing in the uplands, and engages with upland organisations, landowners and parish councils – through its 'Single Conversation' – in order to properly address issues such as higher design and development costs and the scarcity of development sites. Where such costs are higher because of the wider public interest then these costs should be met from general taxation.
- Press for council tax revenue generated through the charge on second homes to be used to support affordable rural housing.



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Summary of recommendations

1. A new integrated strategy for the uplands
2. Strengthening leadership and momentum
3. Empowering communities in the uplands
4. A new approach to funding (a better targeted CAP)
5. Developing markets for carbon and water
6. Securing the future for hill farmers
7. Encouraging enterprise in new green growth areas
8. Raising aspirations: supporting the development of communities
9. Improving broadband and mobile telephone communications
10. Planning to enable sustainable upland communities

In conclusion

We have concluded that there is a need for a new way of looking at the uplands. Rather than defining these areas purely by their agricultural disadvantage, the nation should be considering them as areas that offer great public benefit and environmental value. Not only are they iconic landscapes, providing space, tranquility, beauty and preserving cultural heritage, but they are also working areas that deliver crucial goods and services to sustain and support human livelihoods. The continued delivery of these public benefits is inextricably bound up with the wider sustainability of upland communities, but this has been insufficiently recognised.

The sheer scale of benefits that are provided by these areas – from their ability to store carbon, to providing clean water, to the extent of biodiversity supported, along with their landscape and cultural heritage – is surprising. But they could deliver even more. The national strategy, visible leadership and community empowerment and our levers for change should help to realise this potential. The uplands could provide green and low carbon solutions to environmental issues, and lead the way on developing the green economy, demonstrating and promoting the benefits of working with and making the most of the natural and cultural land assets. They could also be a model of how government supports community solutions for wider benefit.



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