Using Local Distinctiveness as an Economic Development Tool

Proceedings of a workshop organised by the
Countryside Recreation Network
and held at the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh Park,
Warwickshire
on the 13th July 1999

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Countryside Recreation Network

CRN is a network which:

- covers the British Isles
- gives easy access to information on countryside and related recreation matters
- reaches organisations and individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- networks thousands of interested people

The Network helps the work of agencies and individuals in three areas:

Research:
to encourage co-operation between members in identifying and promoting the need for research related to countryside recreation, to encourage joint ventures in undertaking research, and to disseminate information about members' recreation programmes.

Liaison:
to promote information exchange relating to countryside recreation, and to foster general debate about relevant trends and issues.

Good Practice:
to spread information to develop best practice through training and professional development in provision for and management of countryside recreation.

The Countryside Recreation Network is committed to exchanging and spreading information to develop best policy and practice in countryside recreation.

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COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER

By Richard Wakeford
Chief Executive: The Countryside Agency

The Countryside Agency was launched on 1 April this year, following the merger of the Countryside and Rural Development Commissions. Among our duties, we are charged with protecting and enhancing the countryside.

In order to do this we need to understand exactly what 'countryside' is. In a very crude way, we might say that it is all the small towns and villages, and all the space between them. But that approach conveys nothing of why the English countryside is so very special - for those who live there, for those who live in towns, for those who visit the countryside for recreation, and for those who visit from overseas.

What makes it special is its startling diversity and variation in character. What the Countryside Agency calls 'Countryside Character' is an expression of the way the natural and man made elements of landscape combine to make areas different from each other, giving them a unique sense of place. That is not to imply that some landscapes are better or worse than others. It is simply to say that there are distinct differences. For instance:

- the remote moorland summits of the North Pennines give a feeling of openness, which contrasts with the more sheltered dales, with their pastures and hay meadows, bounded by dry stone walls;

- the large scale, flat, open landscape and huge skies of the Fens, with its network of drainage ditches and embanked rivers and intensive arable farming;

- the Cotswolds, where the influence of geology reveals itself in the dramatic scarp which rises to form a plateau above the lowlands to the west and by the honey coloured Cotswold stone which characterises so many of its villages; and

- the South Downs, where generations of sheep and cattle grazing on the thin chalk soils have created the unique downland landscape with its species rich grassland - much of it unfortunately now converted to arable or overgrown with scrub

We all have our favourites. Every part of the country is different and has its own unique character and sense of place. Why is it important to understand the variation in character? Because the countryside is a living resource that needs careful and skilful management. Unless we know what makes it the way it is, we don't stand a chance of conserving and enhancing it for future generations.

It is a living countryside and that means it is an evolving countryside. The countryside we enjoy today reflects the way in which previous generations have left their mark - in economic activity, in the degree of their care for the environment, and in the way they have lived. Similarly, the countryside we want our children to be able to enjoy will reflect our decisions today. Many of us live in the countryside, most of us visit it for enjoyment, many of us make a living from it and travel through it in our daily lives. All of us consume the products of that countryside. The big challenge is, how do we do all of these things sustainably, both now and in the future, so as to retain those qualities which make it special?'

Everyone has a responsibility, but policy-makers and practitioners have a special responsibility to look to the future - to see where the current decisions of society are taking us. Is that where we want to be? If not, what can society do to deliver a better countryside to future generations?

Let me illustrate from past practice how policy makers got it wrong. During the 1930s there were all sorts of worries about pressures on the countryside. Then the war showed how important it was for the nation to be able to feed itself. The farmers were the heroes, and if they could somehow be protected from the temptations of speculative developers promoting ribbon development along the new trunk roads they would not be distracted from their task, and the countryside would be preserved under their benign management.

However that premise turned out to be wrong. Trends in society as a whole have delivered a very different countryside, and we can no longer assume that agriculture is a benign protector of the countryside. Mechanisation and the natural desire to make a profit have combined to lead farmers to increase production, and to reduce costs and inefficiencies. The result has been to force out some of the qualities in the countryside which people most value, such as species-rich hay meadows.

Progress has squeezed out the biodiversity, grubbed out the hedgerows and changed our landscapes markedly. At the same time, farms have become larger, farm

employees fewer, and the range of crops and livestock breeds produced has become narrower. If this has not been the controversial news it seems, that is only because it has happened over 50 years. The price signals sent by the Common Agricultural policy have made matters worse, bringing a sense of frustration, that the future of the countryside is out of our control, bogged down in the bureaucracy of Brussels.

The Common Agricultural Policy cannot take all the blame. Progress in transport has revolutionised global trade. Better transport infrastructure, in the form of motorways and trunk roads, has made more of the countryside accessible. Consumers have embraced new ways of shopping and the products of the whole world are now available at the nearest edge of town supermarket. We have lost our link with the seasons and expect Spanish strawberries and Peruvian asparagus to be available all year round. We have voted with our feet, or rather our wheels, for big retail outlets and as a nation no longer need to rely on feeding ourselves.

There are many forces at work in the countryside; housing development, road building, pressure from recreation, pollution. In all sorts of ways human activity today is shaping the countryside of tomorrow - beneficial, harmonious use, or misuse - the choice is ours to make. Each generation leaves its own mark. Will we leave buildings that future generations can admire as reinforcing the diversity of character? Will we choose to buy products that give a new economic rationale to farming patterns that we value for their scenic or biodiversity 'products'? Will we buy them from local shops and local producers that contribute to rural vitality; or will we buy from anonymous national chains which help to erode local character and distinctiveness. Can we individually or through our work encourage activities which foster a vibrant and locally distinctive countryside?

We can all make positive choices, but how do we turn the inspirational concept of sustainable development into an operational one, and apply it to shape the countryside of the future? The key is better understanding and use of our knowledge of countryside character.

In order to create a vision for the future we have to take stock of what we have now. The Countryside Commission has bequeathed to the new Countryside Agency the maps and descriptions that form the Countryside Character of England. It is rather like a new Doomsday Book - a baseline measure - which future generations can use to chart their progress towards a sustainable countryside. It comes in 8 volumes - one for each region. The first six have already been published.

This work provides a thorough analysis and descriptive record for the whole of England - a consistent and seamless stock-take of the landscape - recording the natural and cultural characteristics that make areas uniquely different.

The result is a comprehensive picture of today's countryside, which will serve as a benchmark against which to measure progress towards a better countryside. That picture will help to increase understanding about how the landscape has evolved across the country; and crucially it should help to inform decisions by individuals, businesses and government that will shape the countryside of the future.

Those involved in managing the land have a particular role to play in maintaining the diversity of the countryside. Agriculture, and to a lesser extent forestry, have had a major influence in shaping the countryside we see today - and as a by-product have provided us with many of our finest landscapes. Often, the features which help to define an area are the result of particular forms of production or particular, locally characteristic products, for example the hop gardens of Kent and Herefordshire, the cider orchards of Devon and Somerset, and the reed beds of Norfolk.

As an organisation, we want to maintain these local variations, but are conscious that trends in agriculture have worked against local speciality products and traditional farming methods, and have helped to erode diversity in the farmed countryside. We think there is great scope to counter these trends, and revitalise the markets for local products which support the local environment. This belief is based on the simple premise that people care passionately about the countryside - but few have stopped to think about how the landscapes they value were created, how they relate to farming practices, and how they can make a difference through their purchasing behaviour.

We want to turn consumers' decisions to our advantage, by helping them see the link between buying the product and protecting the countryside. At the same time, we want to promote new approaches to agriculture which will help farmers to respond to this consumer interest and through diversification, local marketing and branding, make the most of the opportunities presented by the countryside.

There are links here with the recreation and tourism industries, which are also beginning to look at how they can benefit from the growing awareness of countryside character and local distinctiveness. Tourism is one of our fastest growing industries, and the countryside is one of its greatest assets. It attracts a quarter of all domestic holiday nights and a third of all day trips.

1.3 billion day visits were made to the English countryside in 1996. Total spending by all visitors to the countryside was estimated in 1994 to be £9 billion, and total employment supported by visitor activity in the countryside was estimated to be 354,000 jobs. 144 million domestic tourist nights were spent in the countryside, villages and small towns. And if these figures are hard to grasp, recent research has shown that visitors to the South West Coast Path alone bring £15 million into the local economy, much of it into small businesses.

So we can see the countryside is big business. In many ways, the tourism and recreation industry depends of the quality of the local environment - visitors will choose to spend time and money in an area they find interesting and appealing. With good management, the countryside can be **exploited** sustainably, to the benefit of both visitors and local people. Tourism allows people to make the best of the commercial opportunities on offer. Visitor spending can translate into jobs and wealth, and help to support rural services such as buses and village shops; and if the countryside is properly recognised as the resource upon which so much rural tourism depends, the economic spin-off from tourism can provide an incentive for managing it well into the future.

One of the most powerful ways of projecting a distinct image for an area is through promoting locally grown food. Tourism providers can give visitors a special feel for their area is by encouraging interest in local food products and traditional recipes. Hotels and restaurants can use local food producers to supply products which are distinctive to the area, or support organic and other production systems which benefit the local environment, and include dishes which show these off. Other enterprises can provide information about local specialty foods and local suppliers.

By doing so they can help to support local farmers and food producers, provide a commercial incentive for maintaining traditional, low input and environmentally responsible land management which contributes so much to the historical character of many areas, and help to create greater understanding among visitors of the links between the landscape, how it is managed, and the products that come from the land.

A good example of how local distinctiveness can be promoted as a tourism asset, while helping conservation objectives is the Big Apple project in Herefordshire. In this project, local community groups in seven small parishes around Much Marcle have succeeded in both raising interest in conserving the local orchard landscape and

- what opportunities may exist for further sector collaboration and for businesses to further promote themselves within a region (we can then consider how we may foster further business collaboration to aid economic development).

- what mechanisms businesses may in future use to protect their regional names and products (i.e. if regional names do have a value how can we ensure that the products are not copied and are promoted with the endorsement of an official stamp).

Before I bury you in information, I think it would be worth reminding ourselves of why businesses brand themselves, why some of our major retailers have recently woken up to the value of regional brands and why businesses collaborate.

Why Businesses Brand

The company's brand is its "distinct image" conveying signals about the position it wants for itself in the market place. The company's or product's brand image is what sets it apart from other products and it is therefore very important that the product or service consistently lives up to the quality it has set for itself. As Mike Kennedy has previously indicated if the product does not live up to the quality it projects the consumer will be disappointed and the brand and its image will have no value. It is therefore important that the product has integrity and as the current Ronseal TV advert states "it does exactly as it says on the can".

Brands are particularly important in competitive and mature markets such as food and drink. It is for this reason that **branding** has gained increasing interest from meat producers (farmers, processors and retailers) after the recent problems faced by the industry. Consumers are increasingly seeking information and assurance on the provenance of meat products. Due to this the principle retailers are now seeking regional brands. They have noted that often customers will, if the quality and price is right, choose a local or regional product in preference to one of distant or of unknown source. Some retailers, e.g. Tesco, have taken a decision to make a virtue of regional brands and local sourcing and have adopted a mission statement to "**make themselves No. 1 local**", hence their search for regional brands to meet both this need and to indicate to the wider audience, i.e. politicians and lobby groups of their commitment to regional businesses.

The reawakening of interest in Farmers' Markets also aims to capture this growing consumer interest in local products of known provenance. Additionally in the case of Farmers' Markets they are focusing on the desire of some consumers to buy direct from producers, i.e. some consumers want an on-going relationship with the producer. Coincidentally rural tourism and recreation enterprises rely heavily on direct sales as comparatively few independent travellers from the UK buy rural tourism products from travel agents.

Why Businesses Collaborate

In the main, businesses collaborate to enter new markets that they cannot enter alone and they collaborate to save costs. The reason why myself, with others, encouraged farmers in the Peak District to form the Peak and Moorlands Farm Holiday Group was to enable farm accommodation businesses in the area to win the recognition in the market place as a group in a way they, as individuals, could not. Also we recognised it would be more effective if the businesses developed a corporate image and pooled their marketing budgets. To develop a corporate image meant the group had to do much more than just pool their budget. For example, it meant upgrading their accommodation, classifying and grading it. Fortunately the group membership have recognised that and have done much more to develop their product and present it over the past 21 years.

Collaboration and Regional Branding

A number of examples and forms of collaboration between individual businesses have emerged over recent years. Some have sought to use the character of their areas and perceptions about their production processes and locality to help present and position their businesses and their products in the market. In order to illustrate points relating to the range of business and products using these tools for various purposes, the need for products to meet consumer requirements, the need for a commercial and business-like approach when collaborating, the real challenges of building a positive link and contribution to countryside character through marketing effort and the need for business to develop supply chains through a number of market outlets I have chosen the examples of:

Island Heritage	Manufactures garments using the wool of native breeds. The business has created an opportunity for employment in a remote rural area and created a new

use for a traditional building. In itself it does not make a direct contribution to the management of the countryside, nor is it promoting a regional brand. It is, though, a good example of a company contributing much to its local economy.

Lincolnshire Charcoal

This charcoal manufacturing business contributes to the character of the county and directly sustains the activity of woodland management with its many environmental benefits.

Lincolnshire Ornamentals

This Objective 5b project has been very effective in terms of revitalising a sector with high rural employment potential. It has raised the product quality through technology transfer and innovative marketing based around the regional brand. The ornamental sector is an important economic sector for Lincolnshire. Some would argue that it is not important to the character of the Lincolnshire countryside but I would suggest it is. Can we become coloured by the perception that the character of areas is determined solely by high landscape value.

Peninsular Plants

This is a sub-set of activity designed to revitalise horticulture in the South West through the Horticulture 2000 project. It has proved significant in terms of building quality into new products and business collaboration. It uses and presents the warm images consumers have of the South West, i.e. an area that people believe has a particular character.

Peninsular Milk

This farmers co-operative sells milk products which once again picks up on the warm image of the South West to promote its products. The business provides a very strong economic link back into the farming community via its successful business operation, i.e. in the form of added value and profits which are transferred back to the individual farm businesses.

- Tastes of Anglia and the Norfolk Farm Holiday Group - to use regional foods in farm accommodation;
- Peak and Moorlands Farm Holiday Group and Middle England Fine Foods - to promote regional products to tourists;
- Farm Holiday Bureau and Food from Britain - to promote British foods in farm accommodation; and
- West Country Cooking - to promote regional foods in West Country restaurants.

A question we may therefore wish to explore is how will the emergence of Regional Development Agencies and an increasing desire to develop and project a regional identity, foster initiatives of this nature for the benefit of the rural economy and the reinforcement of countryside character or local distinctiveness.

Protecting Regional Product Names

While we may think that the concept of using regional branding is a good idea and a means of encouraging activity that will encourage communities to maintain the character of the countryside, we should be under no illusion about the amount of time, effort and cost involved for an individual business or a group of businesses to develop, promote and protect a product or brand image.

In order to protect their regional names and products a number of regional food businesses have started to register their products under EC Council Regulations and then use those registrations for promotional purposes. Registration can be as a:

- **product of designated origin**, i.e. the product is produced, processed and prepared in a geographic area with quality or characteristics essentially due to the area.

- **product of geographic indication**, i.e. products produced or processed or prepared with a specific quality, reputation or other characteristic attributable to that area.

- **product certified with specific character**, i.e. the name of the product must be specific in itself or express the specific character of the foodstuff. It must be traditional or established by custom.

The strength of the protection of these products lies in the definition of the products and the process of verification to determine authenticity. This route to achieve protection, although potentially expensive to develop and implement for the individual business involved, will only be undertaken if that business sees commercial value in doing so.

The commercial value will very much depend on ensuring the symbols/logos attached to these products gains recognition with consumers. It is therefore essential that they are effectively promoted. If the commercial value can be won I would suggest we have the means by which to sustain activity that helps to establish countryside character.

If, for example, registration provides an improved market for Devon Beef (the Devon Cattle Society has prepared an application for Cattle Society Certification) then perhaps we will once again see more Devon cattle on Exmoor than Continental crosses, i.e. we will see the real character of the Exmoor countryside once more emerge. We, however, might not have to worry about the prospects for South Devon cattle who stamp character over the South Hams in the same way - farmers throughout the country and, in fact, the world have awakened to their value.

SUMMARY OF THE LLEYN PENINSULAR WORKSHOP

By Roy Dart, FRCA.

The Task

The group explored, with Caroline Davies, FRCA and Hywel Jones, a local businessman managing the marketing company, Bwydlin, what were the distinctive assets of the countryside of the Lleyn Peninsular and how they were being used by the community and local businesses to achieve economic benefits. They then considered how, through business and community activity, the distinctive countryside assets were and could be secured or even enhanced.

The Area

The Lleyn Peninsular of North Wales was described as remote with much of its population Welsh speaking, very rural and reliant on agriculture, tourism and recreation for economic activity. In comparative terms businesses in the area had greater difficulty in communicating with markets and transporting products to them.

With a North Wales location the population at large perceived that the Lleyn Peninsular would have a character similar to Snowdonia. However, it offered a sharp contrast as the climate was comparatively mild and the soils rich, supporting an area of largely traditional mixed farming based on dairying and arable cropping (including potatoes and some vegetables). Its coastline and its associated heritage was also rich in wildlife and Bardsey Island just off the peninsular was a well known and valued wildlife reserve.

The remoteness of the area meant that the tourist season was comparatively short and concentrated in the summer season. The principle focus in terms of tourism was the Butlins site at Pwllheli which was recently acquired by Haven. While Butlins had provided on site entertainment, Haven were not doing so and were encouraging its guests to make greater use of the area's assets. As yet the area and visitors had not adjusted to this change in policy.

The remoteness from markets and the challenges posed by the relative small size of farms had led to a higher level of co-operation between farmers than is often experienced elsewhere, e.g. in the form of trading groups such as:

- The South Caernarfon Creamery which is particularly important to the farmers in the area.

- Tattws Lleyn (a potato marketing group)

- Cig Rose Lleyn (a comparatively new co-operative producing a particular quality of beef from calves from dairy herds which would otherwise have no value)

- Bywydlin (a company which has been established to develop and co-ordinate the markets of all the above products and the vegetables from the area).

The Creamery has a well established reputation for quality products and it was argued that the comparative success of Cig Rose Lleyn compared with other ventures of its type was the level of quality management and control exerted along the whole production and marketing process.

The area also had a very active and effective farm holiday bureau farmhouse tourist accommodation group. Their quality management system was also regarded as being important to its success.

Local Distinctiveness/Countryside Character

Against the above background the group spent some time exploring what local distinctiveness meant and how it related to countryside character. Local distinctiveness was considered to be made up of much more than the components of countryside character; it was shaped by communities and involved heritage, culture and business activity.

The group also observed that the development of rose beef and the associated agricultural developments, (e.g. the growing of maize) were making a significant economic contribution to the farm businesses and the maintenance of the community. However, it did not lead to any positive management practices that would enhance either the landscape or wildlife, in fact, it could have the opposite effect.

It was also observed that to date the principle tourism activity in the area relied little on the countryside assets. However, with the change in management of the principle site in the area there may be an opportunity to put into effect a number of changes. In fact, with the policy of the new management, other businesses may need to adjust very quickly and identify what the Lleyn experience is and to sell it through adopting basic marketing principles.

Suggested Action

In conclusion, the group considered that if local distinctiveness was to be used as an economic development tool it would be important for the area to:

1. define its experience
2. ensure that businesses involved were engaged both vertically and horizontally, i.e. there was a need to improve sectorial collaboration and cross sell products
3. define its quality and ensure it was delivered
4. identify the markets to be addressed, i.e. both local and distant
5. sell the experience through raising awareness and ensuring expectations were met.

However, as local distinctiveness was a different concept to countryside character the use of local distinctiveness as an economic development tool would not necessarily lead to the concept of protecting and enhancing important landscape and wildlife habitats. Parallel activity and separate funding streams may still be required to secure those with particular value.

SUMMARY OF THE FENS WORKSHOP

By Peter Hayman, FRCA.

Background

Tim De-Keyzer opened the workshop by providing a comprehensive overview of the area. The Fens cover approximately 5,000 Km^2 and include parts of four counties - Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. To illustrate the past, present and future characteristics of the landscape, a summary report of the 'Wet Fens for the Future' (an Objective 5b project) was supplied to workshop members.

This report recommends that we should:

- Celebrate and take pride in the wetland heritage of the Fens and seek opportunities to maintain, enhance and create wetlands.

- Take account of the benefits that wetlands can bring to the continued development of the Fens when devising policies, strategies and projects.

- Collaborate with others to work towards these common objectives.

Peter Hayman provided an agricultural view of the Fen area summarised by the following key points:

- Very intensively farmed area.
- High quality agricultural soils.
- High levels of employment in agriculture and associated food processing businesses.
- Brief outline of Key Objective 5b projects i.e.:
  Lincolnshire Ornamental Challenge.
  Lincolnshire Quality Beef and Lamb.
  Middle England Fine Food Trail.

Workshop Questions

Following the overview the workshop was asked to consider three questions:

- Can existing tourism and recreation activities in the Fens contribute more to the management aims outlined?

- What new tourism and recreation activity might be developed which would both exploit and reinforce the character of the Fens?

- What partnerships or other mechanisms could be put in place to enable this activity to be developed?

It became clear during the discussion that the Fens are a particularly interesting area to market. The perception is one of intensive agriculture and they are recognised as being **quiet, lonely** and **windy**. (This description was provided by a workshop member).

The following key themes emerged from discussions as suggestions to answer the workshop questions.

1. **Agriculture / Horticulture** - positive approach required for marketing, with open farms and farmers' markets. There is a need to educate consumers and the idea of setting up food trails was suggested.

2. **Countryside Activities** - promotion of fishing, wildlife, cycling, church trails, boating, festivals and mobility.

3. **Focusing** - target effort at short stay and weekend courses.

4. **Partnerships** - develop wider partnerships outside the area, and explore links with nearby 'honeypot' towns and cities.

5. **Community Involvement** - share aspirations for tourism and recreation activities with local communities to encourage support and ownership.

6. **Coastal Management** - explore opportunities to link the unique coast as a marketing opportunity for tourism and recreation.

SUMMARY OF THE HIGH WEALD WORKSHOP

By Ian Cowdroy, FRCA

Introduction

Barney Smith from the Countryside Agency gave an introduction to the character of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It lies some 30 miles to the south of London, between the North and South Downs. The area forms a substantial part of East Sussex, and smaller parts of Kent, West Sussex and Surrey. The landscape includes, in the west open sweeps of heathland, giving way in the east to pasture, arable and some horticulture. 20% of the area is wooded, and the undulating countryside offers mainly short "intimate" views.

The former iron industry has left a legacy of forge sites, hammer ponds and coppice woodland. Traditional buildings reflect local materials, namely timber, brick, clay and stone.

The area's agriculture exerts the greatest influence over the landscape; pasture and rough grazing accounts for more than half of the agricultural area, 30% is planted to other crops and 11% is farm woodland. There are some 2,000 agricultural holdings, with an average size of 40ha or thereabouts. Only some 400 holdings are greater than 50ha. Livestock enterprises predominate, but the last 5 years has seen a reduction in the number of farms specialising in dairy, beef and sheep production. Horticulture remains a significant sector, but the area of hops and fruit has fallen by approximately 25% in 10 years to 1997. There is a significant number of part-time small holdings.

There are a number of initiatives which seek to develop and exploit local distinctiveness, including:

- Food for Thought - a cook book by East Sussex County Council
- A Taste of the South East and Kentish Fare - speciality food groups
- Woodlots - a link between woodland owners and suppliers of timber products

- Harvesting of wild flower seeds and plant plugs
- High Weald Design - outdoor and office furniture and traffic-calming village gateways
- Apple products, including cider
- High Weald Landscape Trail

A Countryside Agency Land Management Initiative in the 4 parishes of Frant, Rotherfield, Wadhurst and Mayfield is a family of experimental projects, based around 6 main areas of activity in support of the land-based economy; the LMI is designed to restructure land management to incorporate principles of sustainable development.

Discussion

It emerged that only the facilitator and rapporteur were familiar with the AONB; the other members of the group had either not heard of it, or were unable to place it geographically. This, and its "imprecise" name, appears to present a particular challenge for future promotion and marketing of the area's products and services.

The following suggestions were made as to how the AONB might build on existing economic, recreational and tourism initiatives:

1. Buildings and Materials

   Given that there will be further development in the area, local building materials should be exploited e.g. hardwood and softwood timber, sand, clay and stone. Emphasis might be placed on timber production, given the length of time required for growing and seasoning, the amount of woodland in the area and the associated benefits for conservation.

2. In-comers

   The area is attractive to purchasers of residential property, often with substantial land attached. Inflated values can prevent the purchase of agricultural land by farmers, but "in-coming" offers opportunities for renting, agricultural contracting and land management advice. Information about

such services and advice should be made available to purchasers of property by land and estate agents.

3. **Collaboration and Co-operation**

It was suggested that suppliers and stockists of products should be prepared to promote produce from the area; if products are purchased locally, the "leaking" from the local economy can be plugged.

4. **Adding Value**

Where "adding value" makes products more exclusive, there is a danger of disenfranchising the local population. Consideration should be given specifically to making and selling local products for local people.

5. **"Staying" Tourism**

Residential tourism in the area should be made more attractive, by promoting short breaks which might include farmhouse accommodation, walking, cycling and visiting nature reserves. A "package" would encourage more consumption of local goods and services.

6. **Foreign Visitors**

More links should be established with tourism operators, including rail companies.

Conclusions

Many of these suggestions should be explored. However, on the basis that local distinctiveness is maintained largely by the agricultural community, the question remained unanswered as to how exploitation should be fostered to ensure that it is the area's farmers who receive the benefit of new ideas.

The suggestions discussed and summarised will be made available to the Project Officer at the High Weald AONB Unit.

SUMMARY OF THE MARCHES WORKSHOP

By Susan Hayes, FRCA

Introduction to the Marches

The English Marches is roughly defined as the counties which abut the Welsh borders, in particular, their western portions. The area is notable for a number of reasons:

- It is an area of transition between the Welsh uplands and the fertile farmlands of the English Midlands.

- It is a sparsely populated area, the main settlements being the historic English plantation settlements of the A49 corridor, e.g. Hereford, Ludlow and Shrewsbury.

- There are still a high proportion of historic and vernacular buildings in the building stock. They are a key element of the landscape character.

- The key natural elements are the woodlands and river corridors. Both of these are of high quality and include areas of international importance.

- The biodiversity interest of the area is localised with some hotspots, e.g. in the Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley. Much of the rest of the area is made up of relatively intensive agricultural production and few unfarmed or unforested areas.

- Recreation pressure is relatively well dispersed but there are concentrations, e.g. Cardingmill Valley, the summits of the Malverns and Symonds Yat.

- The community are resistant to the idea of becoming a tourist destination; they see themselves as a farming area with a traditional way of life. There are hidden levels of unemployment and deprivation, which are not picked out by traditional statistics.

Best Practice Examples

Listed below are some examples of partnership activities in the Marches - all have been co-funded through the Marches Objective 5b programme European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund (EAGGF).

Marches Farm Produce

This producers' co-operative is developing the inter-trading of farm shop produce and speciality food so providing to the customer a wider range of locally produced food and goods.

Food Tourism

Marches Objective 5b partnerships have provided funding and support to encourage the development of Farm Holiday Groups and a Countryside Attraction group, together with capital grants for individual group members to improve the quality of their accommodation or attraction.

Marches Farm Woodland Initiative

A partnership designed to expand and improve the management of woodlands in the Marches in order to develop fully their economic potential and to enhance their environmental value. The project is supported by the Forestry Authority, Countryside Agency, English Nature, local authorities, MAFF and the private sector.

OATEC

This partnership will deliver a blueprint for the establishment of an oat oil extraction plant for use in the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries. This will provide farm businesses with a potential source of sustainable income from a non-food crop traditionally grown in this area. The project is funded by the Countryside Agency, Shropshire County Council, Semundo, Superior Oats, Boots and MAFF.

Clun Valley Alder Charcoal

To produce high quality marketable and locally branded charcoal by reinstating the harvesting of riverside alders.

Workshop Discussion

The group were asked to look at 3 questions:

- Can existing economic development activity in the Marches contribute more to countryside character? If so, how?

- What new tourism and recreation activity might be developed which would both sustain and reinforce the character of the Marches?

- What partnerships and other mechanisms might be put in place to enable this activity to be developed?

They were asked to reflect on their own experience in doing so. The conclusions of the workshop were:

1. Local

- Ownership of the project, i.e. the group members feel it is for their benefit and they are in the 'driving seat'.
- Fresh produce.
- Marketing i.e. farmers' markets; 5 town groups in Devon providing information on where to buy certain products and local knowledge; Harvest Festivals; local produce for the local community with fun activities.

2. Products to reinforce the character of the area

- Honey.
- Peak District Beef and Lamb, 'polo' burgers, using the millstone shape which is the emblem of the Peak District National Park.
- All products should have creditability and be what they say they are, e.g. free range eggs, not bought cheaply at the supermarket and re-packaged.

3. Recreation

- Need open routeways.
- Establish local circular walks for use by locals and visitors.
- Paths should be made fully accessible to avoid the problem of locals/visitors not being able to complete a walk.
- Problems of raising money to produce leaflets for local residents.
- Local ownership of projects and funding could come from Parish Councils, Civic Societies, e.t.c.

- Promotional material to link walks, markets and accommodation for visitor pay back.
- Link walking back to healthy activity, e.g. start at a health centre.

4. Ideas which have come about to improve the countryside character

- Golf courses and local park designed and improved to enhance the landscape character.
- National Trust, restoring landscape features to enhance local countryside.

Programme

10.00	**Registration and coffee**
10.20	**Welcome and introduction** Chairman: Jo Burgon, National Trust
10.30	**Countryside character/Local distinctiveness** * what does this mean? * what factors combine to create it? * what is its value? *Richard Wakeford, Chief Executive, Countryside Agency*
11.15	**Local Distinctiveness as Development and Marketing Tool within the Tourism and Recreation Sectors** * how does it register with consumers? * how is it valued by customers/ * how do we convey messages to potential visitors? * how do we meet their expectations? *Mike Kennedy/Gareth James, English Tourist Board*
12.00	**Regional Branding - a marketing tool for rural businesses** * how rural businesses are collaborating to use regional branding to position and promote their products * the opportunities for sector collaboration to promote themselves within a region * mechanisms for protection, regional names and products, e.g. products of designated origin (PDOs) *Roy Dart, Farming and Rural Conservation Agency*
12.45	**Lunch Regional specialities from the Heart of England Fine Foods Group**
2.00	**Workshop Groups** **Workshop 1 - Llyn Peninsular** *Facilitator:* Hywel Jones, Bwydlyn *Rapporteur:* Caroline Davies, Senior Adviser, FRCA **Workshop 2 - Fens** *Facilitator::*Tim De-Keyzer, Countryside Agency - East England *Rapporteur:* Ian Cowdroy, Senior Adviser, FRCA **Workshop 3 - High Weald** *Facilitator:* Graham Kerr, Countryside Agency - South East *Rapporteur:* Peter Hayman, Senior Adviser, FRCA **Workshop 4 - The Marches** *Facilitator:* Ian Baker, Countryside Agency - West Midlands *Rapporteur:* Sue Hayes, Senior Rural Economy Adviser, FRCA
3.15	**Tea**
3.45	**Feedback from workshop groups**
4.15	**Conclusion of Seminar**

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Michael Cunningham, Councillor, Newry and Mourne District Council

Neil Daniels, Principal Landscape Architect, Caerphilly Borough Council

Caroline Davies, Senior Adviser, FRCA

Janet Dent, Former Director, WI Country Markets Ltd.

Janet Dickinson, Senior Lecturer, University of Hertfordshire

David Dixon, Blackdown Hills AONB Officer, Devon County Council

Charlotte Dixon, Director for the Environment, Strategy and Transport, Government Office for the South East

Jean Ellis, Consultant, Cumbria Tourist Board

Peter Folland, Community Participation Manager, Devon Wildlife Trust

Tony Gates, Trust Manager, Mourne Heritage Trust

Michael Gee, Director, Dartington North Devon Trust

David Giles, Voluntary National Chairman, Trail Riders Fellowship

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