

A CLEAR VIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE

A PROPOSAL TO MAP THE GOODS AND SERVICES OF THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE OF BRADFORD DISTRICT

Background

The Bradford District has 24,438 hectares of land that is open countryside. This constitutes two-thirds of the total land area of the District.

Viewed with respect to the rest of the region, this open countryside is a poor relation in terms of farmland quality; climate (accumulated temperature); farm woodland cover; land-based employment (agricultural, food processing and tourism); and national nature site designation.

Our open countryside is however blessed with a high proportion of moorland and heath; high annual rainfall; and a range of habitat important to bird life, each of which has a significance that will become clear later.

The foregoing is of course an external classification, based on the regional chapter of the English Rural Development Program, and thus could not represent the value that the citizens of the District place on their open countryside. Nor does it portray the full range of public and private goods and services that the open countryside of the District does provide.

Over the years, various reports and studies have begun to document the contemporary aspects of the rural District (see box):

These documents have been created in support of policy development and action for the public sector and were not necessarily intended to capture the less tangible rewards of the rural area such as its ecological goods and services. These encompass water catchment and purification, maintenance of air quality, carbon sequestration, wildlife refuge (biodiversity) and the aesthetic pleasure of landscapes and our enjoyment of them.

Ecological goods and services do have crossovers into public and private goods when we for example recognise our upland areas as capturing our water supply, and our major and minor rivers as having associated flood plains that can regulate water flow. A woodland strategy cuts across those areas of public and private goods when the value of re-wooding riparian habitats and extending forestry in the upper catchment areas of rivers and other water courses are seen to be aids in slowing storm water run-off and in mitigating flooding. Overlaying all of this is our appreciation of these diverse landscapes with their associated habitats as we walk amongst them and espy the variety of wildlife that make it their home.

- Bradford District State of the Environment Report (1994)
- Deer Report (1996)
- People and Nature (1996)
- Landscape Assessment (2000 — a series)
- Bradford's Agricultural Land Use and Sustainable Development (2000)
- Rural Aspirations — Some impressions and observations from Bradford Districts rural Land use community (2002)
- Woodland Strategy (2002)
- Bingley Bypassed — Hidden Poverty in Bingley and Bingley Rural Ward (2003)
- Ilkley Moor Management Plan, 2003 — 2012 (2003)
- Supporting Dispersed Settlements and Rural Areas (2004)

Is there one document that can convey all these values and be an inspiration for our appreciation of the open countryside of the District? Do we know what aspects of the open countryside are most important to the citizens of the District and what steps are in place to continue and enhance

those values? Is there a way to represent the mutual respect and cooperation that must exist between both the public and private realms of our open countryside? What are the areas of concern that we need to be working on?

These questions could indicate a need for a comprehensive and coherent work program, which usefully could be complimented by a thorough study of the rural economies of the District. However, the more basic need is to aggregate all the ecological, public and private services and goods that we value and to present them in an informative and easily accessible guide for the District.

This guide would show what makes our countryside so important to us. It will have a number of uses: as a supporting document for the District-wide rural conference of Bradford Vision to be held in June or July this year; as a stimulus to public consultation; and as a prelude to all the further work that could be carried out. It would also contribute to a greater appreciation of the open countryside and an improving profile/image for the whole of District.

The Proposal

It is proposed to call a meeting at which the range of Stakeholders in the open countryside of the District can contribute towards the mapping of the ecological, public and private services and goods. One overall map would be unable to encompass all the information gathered and so it is likely that there would be a series of maps, some with interlinked themes.

With good pre-briefing and possibly a proforma or format for mapping in place, it should be possible for a significant amount of exploratory work to have been completed beforehand so that the meeting becomes a sharing of spatial knowledge combined with the opportunity to see crossovers and synergies. Ideas for the overall form of the document could be captured.

The Main Hall upstairs in the Mechanics Institute in Denholme can provide a large open space to spread out in, with tables and display boards and with refreshments provided for a half day meeting, probably occurring in early May.

Funding is available from the budget of the externally financed rural proofing project between the District Council and Bradford Vision, the local strategic partnership. The meeting will be called on behalf of Bradford Vision and its Environment Partnership.

Here is an indicative list of the information that could be sought from the meeting to produce a clear view of the landscape with open character in the District:

- What are the ecological and public services and goods that it provides and where are their main locations?
 - Open space parks and reserves
 - Woodlands
 - Farmland, its productive and recreational capacity
 - Water catchments, rivers, becks, riparian habitats
 - Moorland, heath
 - Target areas for LEAPS and Other known refuges
- Who takes responsibility for the land areas?
- Is there an economy based on the ecological goods and services?

It may be possible to extend the mapping exercise to determine what the current issues are and what could become the issues in the medium to long term?

- Can we develop a shared vision for the future?
- Should we be looking at a landscape scale approach to nature conservation (instead of isolated refuges)?
- What is the likely impact of the changes from the Midterm Review of the CAP

- Do we need to take a particular view of the future of land around the major urban centres as well?
 - Multifunctional land use planning?
 - The Countryside Agency/Groundwork vision of the potential of the rural urban fringe?

The meeting will need to be reasonably focussed to make best use of the half day. Thus attendees would be identified on the basis that they have significant contributions to make. However, it is important that there is some ownership of the process in the rural areas of the District and thus representatives from Parish and Town Councils would be present. Others to be involved are:

- Representatives from the Environment Partnership of Bradford Vision.
- Countryside Service, CBMDC
- Land owners,/users and some external agencies and representative organisations:
 - Yorkshire Water
 - Asset Management, CBMDC
 - Farmers and NFU
 - Forestry Commission
 - Environment Agency
- Who could represent the urban communities on the peri-urban fringe?

This proposal was developed with the assistance of colleagues in the Countryside Service and Policy Development Service, CBMDC. Because of its nature, a successful outcome for the work will require a ready acceptance from a good proportion of the stakeholders in the open countryside of the District. It is thus being circulated to gauge interest and to obtain feedback on the proposed content and invitees to the meeting.

Please send your comments and suggestions by the 8th April at which time a decision will be made about going ahead with the process.

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