

FRIENDS OF THE PEAK DISTRICT

CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND SOUTH YORKSHIRE

FOOD AND FARMING – POLICY

Rationale

CPRE South Yorkshire and Friends of the Peak District's work in this area is driven primarily by its concern for the effect of farming and other forms of land management on the character and quality of local landscapes in South Yorkshire and the Peak District. We recognise that farming practices are predominant in shaping rural landscapes, especially in the upland areas of the South Pennines. We place great value on conserving and enhancing rural South Yorkshire landscapes and the upland character of the Peak District.

Policy aims

Our aims are to:

- intervene and add weight to enhance the quality of local landscapes whilst encouraging vibrant rural economies and communities. We will do this in a variety of ways including engaging with the planning system; responding to national, regional and local consultations; and supporting initiatives which improve the viability of the local economy, including farm businesses;
- work with farmers and land owners in a positive and pro-active way that has mutual benefits for landscapes and rural livelihoods. For example, we will , work in partnerships and relevant networks and support exemplar projects or developments.

Hill Farming

Our over-riding concern is the appropriate management of the South Pennine uplands. These landscapes are currently maintained by hill farming, which has always been marginal and subsidised by government. Continued erosion of the viability of hill farming is likely to lead to loss in landscape quality and add to current social and economic pressures on rural economies and communities. Some diversification, especially related to tourism, has mitigated these impacts but new forms of income/added value (for example, local food initiatives) will need long term development and support with appropriate incentives. Part of our role is to ensure that diversification adds to the overall resilience of the local economy without damaging landscape character. We will:

- support the continuity of hill farming where it is the best opportunity to conserve and enhance local landscape character and biodiversity;
- lobby locally, regionally and nationally (as appropriate) in support of policies and strategies that properly reward good upland farm management.

Urban Fringes

In South Yorkshire, there are problems with urban influences on farmed land, including: fragmentation of land; fields, walls and fencing being spoiled by horse-related activities; and other inappropriate activities (fly-tipping, trails biking, trespass and vandalism). We will:

- try to develop small scale projects which address these issues;
- try to limit the over-concentration of equestrian facilities where they are contrary to local landscape character, or where they create pressure to construct new inappropriate housing or infrastructure (for instance, floodlighting, roads, tracks, fencing), or affect farm viability;
- support community supported agriculture, including allotments, and projects that engage people directly with local food production.

Public Benefits

Responsible farming and land management delivers valuable public benefits in addition to food production and food security. This includes managing water supplies, mitigating climate change (for example through peatland management and providing renewable energy such as hydro power) as well as the more traditional benefits of leisure, amenity, biodiversity, maintaining traditional landscape features, protecting cultural and archaeological sites and tranquillity. We will:

- promote the proper financial rewards and recognition for farmers based on the public benefits they provide, mainly through agri-environmental schemes;
- try to increase public understanding of food and farming issues and the role of farming and land management in landscape development and maintenance;
- support innovative land management schemes for improved biodiversity, re-wilding, carbon storage, water management and other appropriate projects where the essential character of the landscape can be maintained, enhanced or restored (if it is degraded). Creating 'new' landscapes will be considered favourably where they will have multi-use benefits.

Land Use

We recognise the competing demands on land for food production, energy crops, recreation and development. So we will:

- try to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from development and promote the use of this valuable resource for agricultural production (including energy crops) that can increase local sourcing of commodities;
- support pilot and larger schemes to develop energy crops and other forms of low carbon energy schemes where the impact on landscape character and other valued characteristics (biodiversity, tranquillity, road safety/use) will not be detrimental;
- adopt a "landscape scale strategic approach" (usually based on landscape character) in determining what the best outcomes for sustainable land use

would be (looking at both food production and wider environmental goods and services) and the rural/social economy.

Local food production and marketing

Producing and marketing local food is crucial to farm incomes, and provides a link from consumers to their local countryside. We will:

- support added value through direct and local sale, including farm shops which have this objective;
- encourage the strengthening of local food supply chains and local marketing schemes such as the Environmental Quality Mark, Peak Choice and Peak District Foods which promote local food and products produced to high environmental standards.

Farm buildings

Farm buildings are a significant part of farmed landscapes. Many historic buildings are no longer suitable for their original purpose, although recent renovation projects show they can be re-commissioned in some circumstances. Modern farming techniques and diversification to increase farm incomes need new buildings. Working primarily through planning system, we will:

- support the conversion of traditional farm buildings for alternative uses. Our preference will be for conversions that bring additional income to farmers rather than short term gains from selling the assets. We will oppose schemes where we believe 'redundancy' is a first step towards releasing existing buildings for development which will be only to be replaced later by substitute larger agricultural buildings;
- support the conversion or replacement of more modern redundant farm buildings to employment or social use, as long as they are: not prominent in the landscape; in sustainable locations; and where there is an acceptable plan for maintaining existing farm activity or land management. Such buildings and sites may well be suitable for processes related to renewable energy such as processing or storage.
- support the conversion of listed or important traditional farm buildings for residential purposes where they will clearly secure farm succession or are the only way to achieve long term preservation. Otherwise we will continue to maintain a general presumption against new housing in the open countryside and green belt;
- insist that all conversions are to a high design standard that normally ensures the outward appearance maintains the essential character of a farm building;
- consider the impact on farm income when commenting on planning applications for new farm buildings.

Woodlands

We recognise the importance of woodlands as a farming asset as well as an important landscape feature, carbon store, energy source and product. So we will:

- Support suitable schemes to improve woodland management and create new areas of woodland, where appropriate.

Farm Succession

We are concerned that as farmers approach retirement age, problems with securing farm succession (arising from socio-economic change and other factors) threaten the continuation of traditional land management and farming methods in harmony with the landscape. To try to address this, we will:

- encourage a sensitive approach to farm succession and its impact on the future size and function of land holdings;
- support initiatives that encourage the next generation of farmers to develop their skills to farm in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner.

Implementation

Where we can, we will try to achieve these policy aims in partnership with other relevant organisations, through complementary action, and add value where appropriate.

Approved July 2009

For review July 2012