

Committee:	High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Date:	1 November 2010
Title of Report:	The Rural Coalition Report: The Rural Challenge
By:	AONB Director
Purpose:	To consider the endorsement given to the AONB Unit's settlement work by the Rural Challenge Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to note the report and ask the Officers' Steering Group to consider how this research can most effectively be integrated into housing and settlement plans.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The distinctive pattern and character of settlement in the High Weald is a fundamental component of natural beauty. Since 2004 the High Weald AONB Unit and English Heritage have been working to understand the inherited character of settlement in the High Weald and develop approaches to policy that supports vibrant economies and communities whilst conserving and enhancing settlement character. The outputs from this work have included characterisation of all historic farmsteads across East and West Sussex, Surrey High Weald and the High and Low Weald of Kent; a web based assessment tool for farmstead re-development; socio economic analysis of farmsteads; research and guidance on rural settlement sustainability; a series of workshops and practical pilots.

1.2 The AONB Management Plan objective S1: to support economic activity in the countryside that also delivers other land management objectives has challenged us to envisage new models for the future of our small settlements that do not just preserve their heritage but sees them evolve and become fully engaged in a living, working countryside. These challenges are not unique to the High Weald but our strong evidence base has allowed English Heritage and ourselves to put forward new approaches that are consistent, robust and clearly articulated. This work has informed our responses to local housing documents and national consultations such as The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing in 2008.

1.3 The AONB Unit is currently in conversation with English Heritage about extending the characterisation work to cover small villages and hamlets.

2. THE RURAL CHALLENGE

2.1 'The Rural Challenge - Achieving sustainable rural communities for the 21st century' was published by the Rural Coalition in August 2010. It cites the work done by the High Weald AONB Unit and English Heritage on rural settlements as a national exemplar

of good practice.

2.2 The Rural Coalition comprises The Local Government Group, Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) ; CPRE; ACRE and Country Land and Business Association. Its report emphasises the importance of understanding settlement pattern and inherited character to inform rural planning and highlights how current rural planning policy which focuses on larger settlements as hubs fails to address the needs of areas like the High Weald which are characterised by dispersed settlements of farmsteads and hamlets rather than large villages in open countryside.

2.2 The report represents a tangible success for the High Weald AONB Unit in highlighting the challenges and potential solutions for housing provision in protected landscapes.

2.3 The challenge of providing appropriate and affordable housing in protected landscapes whilst conserving their special character is set to continue. With the demise of regional spatial strategies and an emphasis on localism the government has passed on responsibility to make plans and determine applications to local authorities. The AONB Unit now have nationally respected research evidence in place to assist local authorities make better decisions on how the location and character of development can enhance this special area rather than damage it.

2.4 AONB Unit officers are available to work with any planning authority who wishes to utilise this research to inform housing development plan documents or community consultations. On this matter, please contact Andrew Shaw a.shaw@highweald.org.

Contact: Sally Marsh & Jason Lavender, Director (job share) director@highweald.org