

Position statements represent the Trust's developing views on current subjects and emerging issues. They are usually produced as a reaction to a development in external public policy or as a precis of development in internal National Trust thinking on an issue. They are used to inform both internal and external audiences.

POSITION STATEMENT RURAL POLICY

Introduction

The National Trust owns and manages a largely rural estate of 245,000 Ha. This includes 183 houses of historic interest, some 20,000 farmhouses, farm buildings and smaller residential buildings and 46 villages. We have more than 1,100 farm tenants and we employ 3,276 permanent and 3,600 seasonal staff. We help to sustain a wide range of rural businesses and community based activity.

What is the Trust's vision for rural areas?

Protection of the countryside has long been a driving force for the National Trust and we remain protective of the features and attributes that matter most to us. We also accept that the countryside is changing, that some changes are necessary and welcome, but that change must be genuinely negotiated. We have no doubt that the countryside must contain thriving rural communities supported by adequate access to services and it must also contribute to national prosperity. We believe that it is increasingly important to promote a participative economy driven by local initiative and enterprise. Such an economy draws its strength from the particular resources of the region: landscape, food, skills, traditions etc rather than relying on major inward investment.

Putting rural policy into practice

In February 1999, the Government published *Rural England: A Discussion Document*, which sought views on the preparation of a new Rural White Paper for England. Four key principles emerged which underpinned the Trust's response. Each of these is accompanied by recommendations for specific action:

- ***The Trust strongly believes that environmental quality should be placed at the heart of rural policy.***
 - There must be a strong presumption in all Planning Policy Guidance against any development which will damage important environmental and cultural sites and features.
 - The test of a new planning proposal should be "is it good enough to approve" rather than the present criterion, "is it bad enough to reject" and this principle should be enshrined in all Planning Policy Guidance.
 - The revenue raised from environmental taxation should be used to deliver associated environmental benefits.
 - A regional planning framework for tourism should be established which enables opportunity for enterprise coupled with appropriate regulation.
 - The Government should maintain and enhance the Countryside Recreation Network as a primary means for disseminating tourism and recreation best practice.

- ***Policies and practice should recognise that the natural and human resources of an area are the basis for sustainable development and that a conserved countryside depends on the vitality of local communities; these communities should be built on the distinctiveness and diversity of rural areas, and have access to locally-delivered, tailor-made solutions.***
 - Regional sustainability strategies should be prepared which set out key economic, environmental, cultural and social objectives
 - The shortfall against the target of building 80,000 affordable houses between 1990 and 1995, as recommended by the Rural Development Commission to the previous Government, needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency; particular approaches are needed for rural areas.
 - The Standard Spending Assessment formula is unreasonably biased towards urban needs and there should be a more equitable allocation of Government funding for rural communities.
 - There is a need for increased central resources for improving and then sustaining properly managed access to open countryside and on the urban fringe.
 - A review of the management and administration of European Social Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal and the Jobseekers Allowance is required to address a lack of co-ordination.

- ***Farming as an activity will remain critically important as the land use of a large proportion of the United Kingdom. Communities based on agriculture will continue to lie at the heart of many rural areas. For these areas a more sustainable system of support and land management is needed.***
 - As the CAP is reformed the funding that previously supported food production should not be lost to the countryside, but instead directed towards sustainable rural development and sustainable agriculture; public funding support for farming should be geared to the delivery of a variety of environmental and social goods.
 - The Government should provide greater resources to encourage the 'Whole Farm Plan' approach for delivering environmental and other "non-market" benefits in non-designated as well as designated areas.
 - There should be a single, plausible, fully co-ordinated system for certifying to consumers that food has come from a sustainable managed source; local and regional produce should be actively promoted.
 - Agricultural technologies should, at a minimum, sustain basic environmental functions of soil conservation and protection of water and provision must be made during food production for conservation of key habitats and, wherever possible, for improving the connectivity of habitats.

- ***While it may be convenient to distinguish between urban and rural communities, there are many similarities. The Trust believes that town and countryside can be brought closer together via strategic and local planning and through education.***
 - Rural areas should benefit fully from the work of the proposed 18 Policy Action Teams which will focus on social exclusion, community self help and voluntary action.
 - Regional Planning Guidance should be strengthened and should set out a framework for development which acts as a key link between national and

European spatial planning policies and statutory and non statutory regional planning strategies.

- It will be essential that an equitable division of strategic aims, objectives and funding are devoted to urban and rural concerns during the production and delivery by Regional Development Agencies of Regional Economic Strategies.
- Planners should negotiate a new future which will include promoting new businesses and developing more residential opportunities, services and high quality community space within market towns.