

Rural Affairs

Working for rural areas, communities and businesses in the South West

Issue 2: Summer 2008

Welcome to Rural Affairs!

Bringing you news, views and issues from the South West Rural Affairs Forum (SWRAF). Each issue will feature a topical issue.

What is SWRAF?

The South West Rural Affairs Forum is an independent body of 23 members with a wide range of expertise from all corners of the region who have an active interest in the countryside and rural communities.

With financial and administrative support from Government Office for the South West the Forum monitors Government policy to ensure that rural people and businesses are properly considered and that good practice is shared.

The eight regional RAF chairs periodically meet with Ministers in person to feed back from the rural perspective.

Specialists are invited to quarterly meetings and task groups take action on a range of issues. Views are canvassed and information disseminated through conferences.

SWRAF has made important contributions to policy-making such as affordable rural housing, planning, sustainable food and farming, climate change, post office closures, rural transport and the Woodland and Forestry Framework.

Pitching for Gypsies and Travellers

A purpose-built, official gypsy and traveller site with a combination of caravans and houses.

Photo: Gypsy & Traveller Team
Bristol City Council



A new report into the need for more permanent and temporary pitches for gypsies and travellers in the South West has just been published, with detailed recommendations for every local planning authority

<http://www.gosw.gov.uk/497666/docs/166217/622079/fullpanelreport>

ALACK OF AUTHORISED sites often means that gypsies and travellers develop land without planning permission, or camp wherever they can find space, leading to a vicious circle of evictions and illicit camping. Providing sites is not just about having an authorised place to live. Legitimate residential and transit pitches enable Gypsies and Travellers to register with a local doctor and send their children to local schools.

Gypsies and travellers have been recognised by Government as “among the most socially excluded minorities in the country” and the Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to “carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers residing in or resorting to their district” known as the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (G&TAA).

The assessments informed the Regional Spatial Strategy review of the issue, carried out by an independent panel appointed by the Secretary of State. The panel report recommends a number of changes to the current distribution of gypsy and traveller pitches in the South West. The recommendations have been made in response to the many representations sent to the Panel and to the discussions which took place at the Examination in Public held in March.

Local authorities now need to define the locations of gypsy and traveller sites in their Local Development Framework documents, advised by the Gypsy and Traveller Unit at Government Office for the South West.

The proposals for each of the South West authorities can be found at www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=3148

Learning to live with climate change

The South West region hosts a wide range of bodies helping us adapt to the inevitable effects of climate change. Mark Rowe investigates

FOR ALL OF US – individuals, organisations or businesses - it makes sense to save energy, reduce waste and even install small-scale renewable energy generation in our home, workplace or community centre. Saving energy and reducing waste, of course, also saves us money.

Energy Efficiency Advice Centres throughout the region (Freephone 0800 512 012) are funded by the Energy Savings Trust and give free and impartial advice. Westcountry Energy Action (www.wcea.org.uk) >



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Wanted: New Members

The Forum is on the look out for new members for 2008. For an information pack, to suggest a name or register an interest please contact Mark Burden at the address opposite or visit the SWRAF website.

Newsletter team: Amy Beddis, Mark Burden, Kate Freeman, Tean Mitchell, Mal Treharne

SWRAF website

This issue of **Rural Affairs** and related links are published on our new website:

www.ruralaffairs-sw.org.uk

Our thanks to 'Energetics Ecology' for hosting it.

Living with climate change

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runs the Devon EEAC giving advice on grants and discount schemes, energy saving measures, energy efficient appliances and home energy checks.

If you are interested in renewable energy systems, RegenSouthWest (www.regenSW.co.uk) can help with advice and grants available through the Low Carbon Buildings Programme (www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk/home). Growing in popularity are biomass boilers, using woodchip, plant material or waste vegetable oil to create heat or energy. "Wind farms suit some areas of the country but biomass is ideal for the south west," said a spokesman for Regen SW. "The resources are here – managed forests, and plenty of farms and suppliers."

For practical ideas and advice about how to adapt to the effects of hotter summers, warmer wetter winters and, potentially, more violent weather events, the South West Climate Change Impacts Partnership (SWCCIP) (www.oursouthwest.com/climate/index.htm) provides practical ideas, focusing on the opportunities which climate change offers, rather than on just the negative impacts.

Building EcoHomes

Reducing carbon emissions from our houses is not solely our responsibility. Housebuilders, too, are increasingly required to meet strict environmental standards. Some seek to go beyond the regulations. SW-based Hastoe Housing Association (www.hastoe.com) runs a national project, Sustainable Homes, addressing energy efficiency and sustainability issues in affordable housing. Hastoe built Devon's first rural EcoHomes Excellent scheme (www.ecohomes.org) in the village of Kenton, where the timber-frame homes include solar panels, rainwater butts, water-saving showers and insulation from recycled materials.

Adapting to climate change may seem daunting but the opportunities for rural communities in re-localising food, energy and services may provide some unexpected positive results for the countryside.

You can read the draft South West Climate Change Plan: www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=3803&tt=swra

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of SWRAF

Planting woodland helps take up carbon

Soaking up climate-changing carbon dioxide in increased plant growth on land is, arguably, one of the few significant actions we can take to sink the



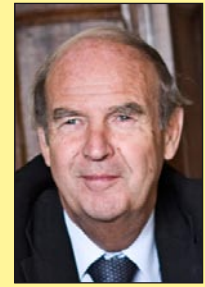
Planting native trees is good for people and the environment

carbon we are putting into the atmosphere. Because of their large biomass per unit area of land, trees are particularly effective so we should be planting more. This is especially true in the south west – where we have the best tree-growing climate in the country and the steep slopes of Devon and Cornwall mean little land use competition from agriculture or development.

At present, only 9% of the region is wooded. The South West Forest Partnership, led by Devon County Council, aims to double the woodland cover within its boundaries which run from Boscastle, east to Tiverton and Ilfracombe, south to Okehampton. The Community Carbon Woods Programme is designed to raise awareness about carbon footprints but there are many other reasons for promoting woodlands for people.

Trees and woodlands provide both educational opportunities and enjoyment in many forms. Each wood incorporates about 20% open space in clearings for all sorts of activities. They may even be big enough for allotments. Management of the wood by the community should, in time, provide fuel, bean and pea sticks, and even fence posts. Forest products like timber for construction lock up the carbon for even longer. Carbon uptake is just one of the benefits of more forests. Burgeoning biodiversity must bring a great warm glow.

Ian Mercer
Chair
www.southwestforest.org.uk
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Rural Advocate for England and Chair of the Commission for Rural Communities, Stuart Burgess, talks to Rural Affairs

"By gathering views and experiences from rural communities to inform national policy teams", says Stuart, "I ensure that the regional voice influences rural policy. It adds colour to the examples I use when communicating at the highest levels of government." Stuart works closely with all the UK RAFs to ensure that local decision-making structures accommodate the rural voice.

As rural areas feel the pinch from increasing fuel costs, what action is the CRC taking? "We are starting to look at long-term futures for rural transport in terms of rising fuel prices, new technologies and the implications of climate change. A major part will be looking at public transport, community and social enterprise transport, taxi schemes, community car schemes, walking and cycling in rural areas and to minimise emissions of greenhouse gases."

See also:
<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/>

Lithuanian ambassador speaks for Migrant Workers



SWRAF and The Cornwall Strategic Partnership hosted a Migrant Workers' Conference last September. His Excellency Vygaudas Usackas, the Lithuanian Ambassador to the UK (left), paid tribute to the success of the Migrant Workers' Group and encouraged building on positive

experiences to ensure the continued successful integration of foreign workers and their families.

More information:
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<http://www.cornwallstrategicpartnership.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=10653>

Introducing...

Steve Parsons, Vice-Chair of SWRAF



Steve has a background steeped in practical agriculture and became Principal of Duchy College in 1987 and was Deputy Chief Executive of the Cornwall College Group.

Recently retired, his work has ranged from the Cornwall Agricultural Council and Objective One Task Force (Chair of both for a time) to Young Farmers. Steve is a great advocate of rural proofing policy and strategy and for strengthening the "Rural Voice" for sustainable rural regeneration.