

Conference: Shaping a vision for the uplands

2-4 June 2008, Sheffield

We had a stimulating few days in Sheffield at the beginning of June as a gathering of practitioners and academics with a whole range of disciplinary interests gathered to seek to draw together their ideas and shape a vision for the uplands. Tricia Henton, director of Environmental Protection, Environment Agency, welcomed us and challenged us to work together at the conference and into the future to see that the uplands was given a collective voice which recognised their unique contribution to UK society. Speakers then challenged us and made us think, workshops allowed us to discuss and field trips got us out to see for ourselves, guided ably by Moors for the Future. The meeting revealed strong cross-sectoral agreement on the importance of the uplands. The uplands are valuable because of the people living and working there, whose actions work with the environment to supply a range of services to the nation as a whole. It is clear that the close dependence of upland and lowland populations is often not sufficiently recognised, so that the fact that 16 million people around the Peak District derived their potable water from the land of just 4000 farmers would startle most folk. The value of the uplands is not easily quantified and hence not easily recognised in policy and practice. Our discussions highlighted that there are both complementarities and potential conflicts in ensuring the effective delivery of public goods from the uplands and

we often don't have an evidence base that is adequate to make informed decisions about trade-offs. Nonetheless we saw some excellent examples of partnership working to deliver positive outcomes for degraded landscapes using both support and market mechanisms in the Peak District backed up by cutting edge research; and heard about many others from around the UK and across the world. Sir Don Curry highlighted the importance of working within the existing regional frameworks. Local action is what's needed for delivery (getting motivated local people together to do ...), however, this needs to be supported by flexible regional and national frameworks that can provide funding and that can integrate and support shared learning for the uplands without excessive bureaucracy. On the last day we were able to report directly to Jonathan Shaw, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Marine, Landscape & Rural Affairs). He highlighted the need for the balancing of support and market mechanisms in providing appropriate reward and noted the presence of many innovative partnership projects delivering tangible benefits for upland farmers and communities. Participants reported back our varied discussions and highlighted that what makes the uplands different from other rural areas is that they provide so much for the entire British population and our visitors. Our draft vision for the uplands of the future: **people living and working in the uplands, recognised and valued, providing benefits to everyone.**

Elizabeth Stockdale, July 2008



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