“GREEN SHOOTS”

The report on a Rural Recovery Plan from the Single Issue Panel established by the Community Life Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2002.

Chairman: Mr D G Miller

Membership: County Councillors: Ms R M Ewer, Mrs E Heard, Mrs J M Mepsted, Mrs S M J Oliver, A R Paynter, W H Roberts (succeeded by P A Glanville).

Date: 4 July 2002

“A hundred years ago, the countryside suffered from depopulation as younger families left rural poverty for better opportunities in the cities. Rural areas were seen as in need of new development and diversification. Nowadays, due to inward migration, the population of rural districts is growing twice as fast as the national average. But many of the newcomers are older and wealthier and can outbid rural residents, with their lower than average incomes, in the competition to buy homes. With less social housing available as right to buy has taken effect, younger people have less opportunity to find affordable housing. These trends are changing the character of communities in some parts of the country – leading to polarisation and social exclusion.”

Source: Our countryside: our future: a fair deal for Rural England
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000 (Cm 4909)

“The County Council believes that social, economic and environmental objectives need to be integrated and directed towards a more sustainable future… in a County… within which individual communities are able to flourish, retain their distinctiveness and contribute to the “way of life” of their people… where all sectors of the population are suitably housed… with a strong and sustainable economy, able to employ all residents seeking jobs in fulfilling work, based on development which does not compromise its natural strengths and resources…”

Source: Cornwall Replacement Structure Plan. Cornwall County Council, 1997

“The public at large, both urban and rural, list as their priorities for national action, environmental protection, farm support, affordable housing and health and education.”


“The challenge for rural communities is clear. Basic services in rural areas are overstretched. Farming has been hit hard by change. Development pressures are considerable. The environment has suffered.”

Source: Our countryside: our future: a fair deal for Rural England
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000 (Cm 4909)
Foreword

Green Shoots

It has been my privilege to lead an eager and questioning team, in seeking to determine the effects of the County Council’s current policies on the rural community. At the outset we recognised that this is a vast subject area and we may only have scratched the surface in our inquiry. There are a number of other topics that we could have covered:-

- flexible local transport
- modernising rural services
- supporting vital village services
- habitats

However, in the time available, we have concentrated on elements of the County Structure Plan, housing policy, local product use and planning policy. These could all have a significant effect for the rural economy if it is to take advantage of the drive to lift the total economy of Cornwall.

We had the benefit of many expert witnesses, whose knowledge and experience proved essential in enabling us to find the detail necessary for us to reach our recommendations.

I would like to express my thanks to the members of the Panel for their diligence, and to the witnesses who gave so freely of their time.

D G Miller
Chairman
Rural Recovery Plan Single Issue Panel
1. Terms of Reference

1.1 The Community Life Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 March 2002 agreed to establish a Single Issue Panel to look at a “Rural Recovery Plan” as part of the 2002-2003 Work Programme. The Panel considered the Terms of Reference that had been drawn up by David Miller, D M Pattison and M Perry which were:

- To collate the existing County Council and District/Borough Council policies that may have an impact on the rural economy.
- To evaluate the effect of these policies on the economic/environmental balance (sustainability).
- To determine the approach to be taken in addressing these issues.

The question to be addressed by the Panel was:

**What changes to Council policies are required to sustain rural communities?**

1.2 The Panel did not consider the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis as this has been covered by another panel - the Rural Recovery Group - which held a meeting on 28 February 2002. The minutes of that meeting were considered by the Single Issue Panel, particularly the proposals that greater use of the County Farm Estate for demonstration and best practice is necessary; improvements in farm advisory services; niche marketing; wider diversification in the Structure Plan proposals for housing which, if only related to agricultural need, should be widened to include employment opportunities in smaller villages. Member meetings were planned to cover the following topics:

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2. Affordable Housing

2.1 Affordable housing is housing for sale or rent at a price significantly below levels on the open market, which allowed people in need to access housing which would otherwise be unavailable to them. This is a major issue in Cornwall
where there is a continued demand and need for such housing. The County Council has a limited role in its provision as this is a District Council responsibility. The County Council’s principal mechanism is exercised through the policies of the County Structure Plan. Previous policy has sought to ensure that planned sites for housing contained an affordable element where it was appropriate. An “exceptions” approach is being utilised in rural areas, enabling affordable housing schemes to be brought forward on the edge of villages as an “exception” to normal housing policies.

2.2 The Structure Plan has a role to play but mechanisms and resources are also required to ensure that housing is available for those genuinely in need.

2.3 A BBC TV “Close-Up” programme, broadcast on 13 March 2002 entitled “Rift Valley” and relating to the South Hams, in Devon, was provided in evidence for Members. Devon’s Structure Plan had identified a need for 14,000 new homes in Plymouth and the South Hams. There was a proposal to develop the Sherford Valley contained within the Plan. There was considerable public objection to the proposals due to the implications for the environment. But, as houses continued to increase in price, many people were renting because they could not afford to buy. Housing Associations were also struggling with over 700 people on one waiting list. In future two thirds of available housing would be affordable to people with local connections (who had lived in the area for at least 3 years). For any new community to be sustainable in the long term the evidence also identified the need for suitable infrastructure and development of facilities for the residents.

2.4 The review of Cornwall’s Structure Plan has discounted the development of new settlements. It is intended to allow development in existing towns and villages. One key issue is that affordable housing needs to remain affordable in perpetuity as housing in villages once designated as affordable, ceases to be affordable once it entered the market place. With the average price of houses rising at a rate of 15-20% per annum and wages rising by only 2-3% per annum, the gap is increasing.

2.5 Exmoor National Park

2.5.1 Members of the Panel considered in detail the written evidence received from the Association of National Park Authorities. Exmoor National Park is using the Structure Plan approach to “exceptions” by allowing additional housing in villages where there are special requirements. However, Members questioned whether the policies would get legislative approval and the possibilities of this approach leading to both affordable and very expensive housing – a two-tier approach. The proposals covered changes that were needed in fiscal measures and planning policy guidelines.
2.5.2 In drawing on the proposals in the evidence there was a Member view that building for holiday use did not fall within development boundaries. In an effort to promote tourism, development had taken place outside development boundary lines. It is necessary to gear diversification towards employment opportunities rather than tourist developments on farm land, as farm buildings should be redeveloped for local people rather than tourists. Such buildings could be converted into affordable housing rather than for tourism.

2.6 The role of planning and other policies

2.6.1 Planning is about the efficient and effective use of land. The County Structure Plan (CSP) provides a strategic overview of policy and the review has a target for provision of new houses of 41,000 for the 20-year period from 1996. The CSP is not a stand-alone document. Other strategies, such as the Objective One Programme, should be compatible for effective implementation. Current policy states that where there is a proven need for housing, a percentage of it should be affordable. [The recent proposal by a private developer for 500 houses in the Camborne area will be a test of this policy at both District and County level].

There will be a requirement of any large-scale project to ensure that any developments will be sustainable with suitable infrastructure and facilities.

2.6.2 The Government’s consultation paper on Planning Obligations is considering the need for developer contributions to services for all development, including commercial uses to have a tariff levied to provide affordable housing.

2.6.3 The CSP review will take 2-3 years to full adoption. The initial policies are being drafted and are considering a definition of what “affordable” meant and how needs should be assessed for Cornwall as a whole. The use of the “exceptions” rule will continue although it provides for very few homes. It is also important to ensure that there is an appropriate mix of housing provided in relation to the size and value of properties.

2.6.4 About 10% of the available housing stock is considered affordable although, with the steep recent rise in house prices, this figure may well fall. Average earnings of full time workers have risen much more slowly than UK average rates in the last few years and in 2001, at £334 per week were 33% below the national average. Many workers, especially those employed seasonally or part time earn considerably less. Average household incomes, about £17,500 are also very low by national standards.

2.6.5 Reliable statistics for district council areas are not available but it is likely that, broadly speaking, figures fall the further west in Cornwall one goes. Statistics on the proportion of the population on benefits, and so having particular income deprivation problems, show that pattern.
2.6.6 The problem is not new, and was identified in the submissions for Objective One and has been an issue for over twenty years. It will not be resolved by the planning process in the short-term. Affordable housing should not be considered in isolation, as economic development is required to narrow the gap between wages and house prices.

2.6.7 Planning can only insist on affordable housing on new sites and usually on sites of over 25 houses. Housing Associations are inadequately resourced to deliver what is required, and there are issues about the ability of the house building industry to absorb the costs of providing all affordable housing.

2.6.8 “Affordable” should mean affordable for the needs of the people who require the property. It should not just mean a one-bedroom property. There are many single people in Cornwall who are on wages significantly lower than the stated average resulting in additional barriers to entry onto the housing market.

2.6.9 Government policy is to use brownfield sites, initially, for housing. The CSP has identified that 25% of new build should be in such areas, but some of these sites are not feasible as they would be too expensive to develop. About 60% of Devon and Cornwall Housing Association’s stock is built on brownfield sites. The construction industry cannot be relied on for support and Cornwall is considered to be a money-making area. It was also essential that houses should be built where people actually wanted to live.

2.7 Assessing need for affordable housing

2.7.1 District Councils have different methods of collecting this information. Carrick, Restormel and North Cornwall are working together using the same approach. The exceptions policy varies across the County, depending on the District area, changes over time and according to the department of the District Council to which the land related. Each District also assesses need in a different manner, some use housing registers whilst others commission surveys. There is some doubt whether any of these methodologies are rigorous enough, particularly as in some areas empty units could be filled three times over by people who meet the criteria. It is clear from the evidence that different approaches make a countywide assessment difficult, but this was at least a positive step. On the other hand the County Council has argued for lower housing provision resulting in fewer houses being built and coupled with rising land prices, an even smaller proportion of these would be affordable. There is also a need for flexibility when assessing ‘affordable’ in different areas.

2.8 Housing Associations

2.8.1 Housing Associations were established to help local authorities to meet their housing objectives. Some restrictions that apply to private organisations do not relate to housing associations. However, associations use grants and raise loans
to carry out their work with lenders often reluctant to become involved because of Section 106 (conditions imposed on planning applications) restrictions. If the association was to go bankrupt the local authority could take over control and the lender could not recover the housing.

2.8.2 Housing Associations encounter problems in trying to maintain a stock of affordable housing. Many lenders are unwilling to give mortgages when the “in perpetuity” clause could lead to constraints in selling the property in the future. Nationally, 20% of housing association properties were in “shared ownership” but this percentage is less in Cornwall.

2.8.3 Currently shared ownership consisted of 15-20% of the property portfolio of one Housing Association giving evidence to the Panel. It was recognised that younger couples would have aspirations for higher incomes, enabling them to buy a share of the house, rent the rest at a subsidised rate and, as their income increases, have the ability to buy extra shares.

2.8.4 In the Business Plan for one local Housing Association there is an outline of a small level of development each year of between 8-16 dwellings. This is dependent on grant rates and cost indicators from Government being realistic. There is an indicated rate of growth of 200 houses per year in Cornwall over the next few years and one rural scheme in each District area.

2.8.5 Evidence from the representatives of housing associations indicated that planning policy should allow for at least one development of affordable housing on small sites in rural areas. Tariffs were inappropriate for Cornwall as there are concerns that checks would need to be in place to ensure that the money was actually used for affordable housing developments. Some research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sought clarification on the most important consideration - the provision of affordable housing or the protection of fields.

2.8.6 The County Council is under an obligation, it would appear, to make as much profit as possible when selling redundant land and buildings. However, Panel members questioned whether this represented Best Value in the long term as the shortage of affordable housing had a knock-on effect on other areas such as the costs of care and rented accommodation. A Parliamentary Select Committee is also considering the cost to the community of the lack of affordable housing. Is it possible to change the County Council rules and policy so that, where it was agreed, land would always be sold, when appropriate, for affordable housing development?

There is a question over the use of compulsory purchase orders for vacant properties and there is currently a Government consultation document on this issue.
2.8.7 One of the main problems for Housing Associations is finding available land at an affordable price. Is the County Council able to examine any property holdings that could be available for affordable housing?

2.9 Evidence from District and Borough Councils

2.9.1 The County Council is not a Housing Authority and as a consequence is only in a position to make recommendations to District and Borough Councils.

2.9.2 Penwith District Council provided written evidence on affordable housing. There are problems in identifying a threshold for the requirement for affordable housing as housing needs surveys could be statistically unreliable in identifying need in individual villages. The Council is embarking on a project to investigate how housing needs assessments could be more reliable and up to date and is willing to share its findings with the other Districts and the County Council. The Local Plan includes an exceptions policy but no truly exceptional schemes had been submitted. A Best Value Review is being undertaken on the provision of housing which involved looking at all aspects of the Council’s responsibilities in the provision of sufficient and suitable homes. Surplus redundant buildings or land were not necessarily in the right place for development. The County Council has a role in working with the Districts to coordinate information and policy approaches, identifying suitable surplus sites and considering developer contributions from affordable housing providers.

2.9.3 North Cornwall District Council provided written evidence. The Council provides services for a predominantly rural area and its villages are a priority for development. There are problems in accessing housing due to high house prices and a low wage economy. An estimated 12% of the housing stock in the area consisted of second homes. The ‘right to buy’ schemes has eroded the stock of social housing, rented homes in the area were priced at an average of £450 per month, and the Housing Benefit system was inadequate in this context. The ‘criteria’ used by rent officers was considered to fail people on low incomes as benefits were based on theoretical housing costs, not reality. The provision of affordable housing in the District is the number one priority for capital spending. Two sites for affordable housing have been identified in the Local Plan and an element of this type of housing is desirable for all new sites.

A joint approach is needed between the Council and the District Councils to deal with the rural economy.

2.10 Parliamentary Select Committee

2.10.1 A Select Committee has recently been established to consider affordable housing. The Committee had a number of issues to consider, including:-
• what is affordable?
• the scale/location of demand;
• quality issues;
• the adequacy of existing resources;
• how resources could be balanced between social housing and options for owner occupation for those who could not afford to buy;
• whether planning targets are unreasonable; and
• the cost to the community of the shortfall of affordable housing.

2.10.2 It is re-assuring to note that the Single Issue Panel Inquiry was covering very similar ground and its deliberations would be forwarded to the Select Committee if appropriate.

2.11 Self-build

2.11.1 Self-build affordable housing was time-consuming, expensive to set up, required a committed group of individuals with reasonable capital and is difficult to control once it went on the market.

2.12 Housing needs of farmers in crisis

2.12.1 Evidence was presented on the problems being experienced by farmers as a result of the Foot and Mouth crisis. Many have been forced to leave their rented farms, had lost not only their home but also their job and required affordable housing. The ARC-Addington Fund (Green Welly Fund) is developing a new strategy to support such farmers in the long term. (Information on this strategy was tabled for Members).

3. Use and re-use of locally sourced products

3.1 The use and re-use of locally sourced products has a number of key components:-
• ensuring health and safety
• reducing the distance food has to travel from production to plate
• promoting Cornish distinctiveness
• Agenda 21 issues of waste minimisation, recycling and re-use.

3.2 The County Structure Plan (CSP) policies are supportive in this area but only part of the methodology to bring about changes. Planning policies are often seen as constraining activity, but they could positively enable the local economy. The review of the Structure Plan needed to consider how value could be added to local products. The Plan itself has a strategic role and could set high standards for development and the need to reflect local character. It could therefore provide a basis for using local materials. Some of the District
Councils have produced ‘Design Guides’ which had reviewed the geology of the area and how local materials have contributed to development. These have been accepted as supplementary planning guidance.

3.3 Value for money, efficiency and competition often conflict with the use and re-use of locally sourced products. The County Council is involved in a number of funding streams, including Objective One, Heritage Lottery and Regional Development Agency projects. The money is used for regeneration in towns and villages, environmental regeneration and conservation of mining sites. There was a need to provide cost effective schemes but problems arose as a result of the availability and cost of local materials. This often resulted in the use of foreign materials for local projects. There is a need for regeneration of granite quarries, as many small quarries do not have the tools or labour force to provide the required amounts.

3.4 The Design Statement currently being prepared for Major Development is targeted mainly at Objective One projects and advises on the use of local materials. It does not require that buildings are ‘traditional’ as the document is forward looking, thereby enabling recycled materials or other local products to be used.

3.5 The Minerals Local Plan encourages the development of small quarries to produce materials for local construction. But capitalisation is low and the skills to produce such materials are not available. Cornwall Enterprise could assist in marketing and to investigate the availability of grants and supporting apprenticeships for such work.

3.6 The Waste Local Plan was considering the requirement to address local markets for recyclates in order that there were local solutions to the waste issue.

3.7 Contracts - In the past large contractors, many of which were based out of the county, had won contracts on price. The Countryside and Historic Environment Section had sought to address this by breaking down large schemes into smaller parts, thereby enabling small local firms to contract for the work. This had proved particularly effective in the field of mining heritage work where work totalling £50 million was expected to have a significant impact on the local economy. The County Council also needs to recognise the importance of environmental and heritage work to the local economy.

3.8 Local Agenda 21

3.8.1 The County Council’s principles regarding its approach to LA21 are:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- the creation of higher levels of economic growth and employment
- the effective promotion of the environment
• the prudent use of resources.

3.8.2 Recent initiatives which have reduced the demand for primary aggregates (which were sourced outside the county) included recycling road planings for road base material and the use of crushed green glass in asphalt (glasphalt) for road construction. Such initiatives provide more work for local quarries involved in recycling.

3.8.3 Some key areas for improvement would be the segregation of waste on construction sites for reuse or recycling purposes. Secondly there is a need to update construction specifications to include options for the reuse or recycling of products. Thirdly, architects should be encouraged to specify the greater use of locally available materials and planning powers should be used to promote local distinctiveness. There is also the issue of procurement and a need to encourage County Council departments and suppliers to adopt Environmental Management Systems (EMS) which would encourage both departments and suppliers to address ‘embodied’ energy and promote local purchasing.

3.8.4 Evidence from Kerrier District Council indicates positive examples of use and re-use of locally sourced products. In Camborne, 140 tonnes of garden waste per month are being processed at a local farm that had previously been an unprofitable dairy farm. The farm charges a gate fee to handle the waste and then uses the final product on its land. It was hoped that in the future the product, which had been scientifically tested, would be sold back to the residents of Kerrier. In Stithians a traditional farm has been converted to a worm farm and was dealing with kitchen waste and, in a similar way, it was hoped that this product would be sold back to residents. These were considered to be excellent projects as they reduced the need for landfill.

ReMade Kernow is a project that looks at the reuse of local or recyclable materials and attempts to develop local markets for this purpose. It was considered that there was great potential for the scheme but it was only funded for three years which may not be enough time to develop markets.

3.8.5 Evidence from Restormel Borough Council indicated that there is a strategy within the Council’s procurement policies that considers sustainability and the use of local contractors, including local farmers, and purchasing. The policies of the Local Plan support the development of local distinctiveness and character, in addition to farm diversification and the need to create markets for local materials. An example of this approach in practice is the Cornwall Sustainable Building Trust - a partnership involving North Cornwall and Caradon District Councils. The partnership aims to demonstrate the potential benefits for adopting an ecological approach to building which used an advanced approach to design, materials, systems and planning. The Trust aims to provide high quality and appropriate training and to promote the use of local materials.
3.8.6 Food miles

More emphasis should be given to the importance of producing the ‘end’ product in Cornwall in order to reduce the supply chain. Many frozen meals came into the County by road from Wales, which appears absurd given the availability of Cornish horticultural and farming products.

Farmers’ Markets are important for local purchasing and rural recovery. In many instances locally grown vegetables are sent elsewhere for packaging and then returned to Cornwall for sale. It was considered that co-ordination was required on a countywide basis in order to encourage more farmers to participate and to raise awareness. However, many farmers find it easier to sell to large producers than to sell their products at Farmers Markets, which are usually only on a small scale and held once a week.

4. Rural Business

4.1 The overall aim of the County Council’s policies for the economy was to make provision for the needs of existing and new businesses, whilst recognising new requirements and circumstances. The importance of the environment as an economic driver and sustainability are major issues that must be addressed.

Much employment in Cornwall is located in rural areas outside towns. As a result of changing economic circumstances County Council policies needed to facilitate diversification and alternative uses. Redundant buildings and sites could be used for a range of business opportunities, whilst still retaining the character of the local environment. There is a need for rural areas to continue to thrive and for business opportunities to be closely related to local skills and resources. Rural businesses require the right level of Internet connection which will allow them to diversify.

4.2 Parishes are composed of rural businesses - landowners or industries, and the amount of unpaid workers in rural businesses should not be forgotten.

4.3 Tourism and farming

The tourist and farming industries in the County need to work together and, to this end, affordable housing was a necessity. The National Young Farmers Club have highlighted the importance of encouraging young people into the countryside. Farming and tourism needed to be encouraged otherwise the countryside could disappear. Britain and Holland are the only two countries in Europe who were not taking advantage of the Early Retirement Scheme, which required matched funding from the government. The average age of farmers in the country is 58. In Cornwall the Young Farmers had 800 members, 50% of which were under 18. The main problem for young people is the cost of returning to the County if they left to pursue higher education. Traditional family farms are less sustainable than previously and it was therefore necessary to
encourage early retirement in order to allow farms to remain within a family. There is a European scheme for encouraging early retirements and subsequently new entrants into farming outlined in *Agenda 2000 CAP Reform: a new direction for agriculture, MAFF 1999, PB 4543.* “The Rural Development Regulation permits a scheme to promote early retirement from farming for farmers who have farmed for the previous ten years (and farm workers on those lands) aged between 55 and normal retirement.” This is an annuity scheme, but “given national circumstances, one possibility would be to have a targeted “lump sum scheme”. The Government has not signed-up to this scheme at present.

4.4 The issue of whether some starter farms, as advertised by the County Council, are viable at 80 hectares also needs to be considered. However, evidence from a County Council tenant farmer suggested that in his case the starter farm of thirty six acres, which he was converting to organic status, would make it a viable concern. It had been seen as necessary to diversify in order to make a living. Presently market gardening took place in addition to a few pigs and cattle. Produce from the farm is sold at the farm shop situated at the front of the farm. Issues relating to what the tenant described as “excessive bureaucracy” – locally, nationally and with Europe, had made life difficult. The tenant felt that the County Council should raise awareness of its farms and their diversification methods by erecting appropriate signs on its property.

4.5 Tourism development in the countryside should enhance existing developments before expanding them and it is important to recognise their effect on the environment.

4.6 County Council Property Management

4.6.1 The County Farms Estate is a part of the County Council’s property portfolio. It is considered that the farms needed to contribute more to the rural economy by providing better employment opportunities. In addition, buildings not suitable for farming can be used for other purposes such as workshops and offices, as well as tourism uses. The County Council also needs to consider whether there were any opportunities for affordable housing within its properties in rural areas.

4.6.2 There are a number of views on the size of viable farms. Dairy farms need a considerable amount of land and cattle. Larger farms also appear to have better resources to access funding. But size is not always an important factor because certain types of farming, such as horticulture, are considered to be a lifestyle choice. The County Farms estate was keen to see that horticultural demand was met but had advertised for expressions of interest without response. In evidence, the Panel heard that the viability of smallholdings in many cases is dependent on the associated infrastructure and housing, rather than the land itself.


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4.6.3 The perception of County Council starter units is to allow tenants to progress. However, many smaller businesses were based on a local need, resulting in tenants wanting to remain in the community where they had established a market for their goods. If this is the case properties would become 'locked-up' and inaccessible to prospective tenants. Conversely, these units are meeting a local need.

4.6.4 The County Council does provide assistance to local planning authorities in order that the need for agricultural development was recognised and new dwellings could be built. It advises where necessary on the lifting of agricultural restrictions in certain areas.

4.6.5 There is a significant backlog of maintenance on many of its properties and there would be associated improvement costs if the property was to be let as affordable. The County Farms Strategy states that there should only be a few small business opportunities, although in some cases it was a fact that small dwellings are retained because it would be unwise to dispose of them. There are approximately 40 House and Garden tenancies in rural locations which had formerly been County Farms that are no longer required by the Estate. Many of the tenants had been offered the opportunity to buy them at a discount. The County Council could take a view on their disposal, but is not a housing authority although it could consider working in partnership with a rural housing association.

Is there a future for farming?

4.7 There is a future but it will not necessarily be in traditional agriculture. Working part-time on a farm in addition to another job and “niche” marketing would be factors in the future.

4.8 Food miles should be restricted by stipulating that organisations should buy produce locally. Farming should also recognise the need for ‘add-ons’ to the traditional methods, such as offices and workshops. The County Council has a role in lobbying the government for change and to raise awareness of assistance that was available to farms. Bureaucracy needs to be addressed. If farming is to be sustainable in the County in the long term it is necessary to recognise the importance of retaining young people in the industry.

4.9 Training issues

4.9.1 Duchy College gave evidence to the Panel and indicated that 15% of the College’s activity is the traditional education of 16-19 year olds. The rest of its work dealt with diversification initiatives, training and development and Objective One projects. Many agricultural businesses have links with processing and tourism. Policy seemed to dictate that businesses were required to be bigger and diversify, but to achieve this, high quality staff were required. It is
proving a challenge to find and retain young people in the industry because of the cost of living in the county and the image of farming itself. There appears to be problems in raising the interest of young people who are not from a farming background, and careers advice needs to be more readily available. Government policy encourages schools to retain pupils rather than encouraging them to pursue vocational qualifications, such as farming, and there was a need, therefore, to lobby the Government accordingly. European grant-funded training schemes exclude legislative training. This means that farmers incur costs in updating their knowledge of the law relating to their industry. The Curry Report “Farming and food: a sustainable future”, published in January 2002 suggests that agricultural colleges should develop Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVES).

4.9.2 In order that youngsters were encouraged to work in the industry better pay and conditions were required and new styles of promotion were needed. Work standards and methods also needed to be raised.

4.10 Planning

4.10.1 Planning is sometimes seen as a barrier to the rural economy. Yet its role is to regulate and prevent people from doing things against the public interest in relation to the use of land. It has to be operated fairly and is about the use of land, not individual interests. There are often different issues that led to publicity and examples of ‘unreasonableness’ in not allowing ‘reasonable’ development. There is evidence that planning does not constrain development. However, Planning does need to be handled with sensitivity in rural areas and be related to existing development and the environment. Building in the open countryside needs to be strictly controlled. It is the role of the Local Plans to detail plans for the diversification of farms. The Plans should be supportive of well conceived farm schemes that were consistent in their scale and design with their locality. The funding of any such schemes, although it often arose, was not material to planning considerations.

4.10.2 The Structure Plan promotes the use of existing buildings in rural areas, rather than new development. It is considered that a range of industries could be successful in rural areas where there is a supportive infrastructure. The policies in the Structure Plan on rural recovery do not want development to prejudice farming but to encourage on-farm diversification and non-farm diversification. Schemes need to have a functional requirement for location in the countryside. Tourism development in the countryside should enhance existing developments before expanding them and it was important to recognise their effect on the environment.
5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Affordable Housing

Members expressed their disappointment at the absence of Planning/Housing representatives from the District/Borough Councils at the meetings and wondered whether this highlighted a lack of joined-up thinking between the County and the District Councils.

- There are usually objections to any proposal for affordable housing despite wide consultation and involvement with communities.

- There are hidden costs for organisations when building homes and there is no differentiation in the way that housing associations are dealt with i.e. where a private developer provides a number of homes, some of which are to be affordable, they would approach the housing association to pay some of the obligations.

- Housing Associations receive larger grants for refurbishment of properties but this will not necessarily provide extra dwellings. The average grant for a new house was £40,000 whilst an extra £10-15,000 was released for refurbishment purposes.

- The County Council should consider its strategic role within planning policy and identify strategic settlements and consider selling redundant property for the development of affordable housing. It should also address the contributions for infrastructure that developers are required to pay as, in the case of housing associations, the higher the contributions the less housing will be provided. (*The new Structure Plan will be able to deal with the more strategic issues but the Districts would need to be consulted with regard to implementation at a local level*).

- There is a need to ensure that there is an affordable element in every parish so that they were available to all, rather than concentrated in towns and villages.

- Second homes are adding to the problem of local provision. There might be an opportunity to charge full council tax on second homes and ring fence this money to invest in affordable homes.
• In many areas there were falling rolls at schools as a result of people not being able to afford houses in certain areas.

• Lobbying of Government in the long term would be necessary if there was to be a change in direction.

• Work needs to be carried out in partnership with the District Councils concerning compulsory purchase policies.

• A recognition that economic growth, opportunities for employment and better income levels would help to combat the problems and the Community Strategy has a role to play in dealing with many of the issues.

5.2 Use and re-use of locally-sourced products

• The County Council spent over £200 million in 2000-2001 on goods and services, excluding payments made direct from school bank accounts, and needs to make small shifts to impact the local economy. It needs to take care that when buying goods and services, local suppliers are able to compete effectively. This can be done by ensuring local suppliers are aware of the current requirements of the County Council, and any new health and safety issues.

• In some instances safety requirements meant that certain types of packaging had to be used rather than recyclable or reusable cartons although the District Councils were working with organisations, such as Business Link, on waste minimisation schemes which did impact on packaging.

• There is not a conflict between traditional and modern materials as there is a need to be innovative and find different ways of using materials where it is appropriate.

• World Heritage Site status will be a key issue to Cornwall and will need to ensure an appropriate balance between conservation, environment and economic development.

• Work on training needs to be progressed immediately.

• The Environmental Management System (EMS) provides a means of determining if a contractor used local products, in addition to considering issues of sustainability.
• There needs to be a balance between tourism, environmental issues, the availability of good jobs and products.

• ‘Local’ has a different meaning, depending on where an individual lives within the County – i.e. those living in east Cornwall might consider Plymouth to be local.

• Individual composting is preferable to on-farm projects, but the latter could produce a product for sale.

• Many quarries are sole trader organisations and need to access public sector assistance for marketing and training initiatives.

• Apprenticeship schemes have been in place in the past. Incentives are required to assure the future of many trades and the County Council could be seen to have an influencing role.

• Migrant workers are being brought in from outside the County to meet needs of employers.

• Small businesses within the County should be encouraged to expand as a higher priority than encouraging new businesses into the County from elsewhere.

5.3 Rural Business

• The tourist, farming and other industries in the County need to work together with training providers.

• There are different opinions on the size of a viable farm.

• Viability of smallholdings is dependent on the associated infrastructure and housing, rather than the land itself.

• There are niche opportunities in certain areas.

• The County Council needs to consider if it can offer assistance by considering the disposal of property assets.

• For Planning purposes, any development would need to demonstrate the need for dwellings and to ensure that the business would be viable.
• The County Council could assist the rural economy by facilitating schemes, particularly for smaller organisations who do not have the time or resources to pursue schemes, although it was recognised that there were umbrella arrangements in the agricultural sector to assist. Small businesses need to be made more aware of the help that was available to them, such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the Integrated Area Plans.

• The County Council had also employed a part-time facilitator to assist tenants with accessing funding.

• The County Council should continue to support the Rural Development Programme.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Affordable housing

(a) There must be closer collaboration between the County and District Councils to ensure that there is a common methodology for the assessment of housing need, in partnership with the housing associations;

(b) The use of compulsory purchase for land and buildings is highlighted as a means of housing associations meeting targets for affordable housing;

(c) The existing County Council Capital Strategy is considered, in the light of Best Value, to ascertain whether it could provide opportunities for affordable housing on redundant sites and buildings;

(d) The Structure Plan should give guidance to developers, District and Borough Councils and housing associations in particular, on Section 106 (developers’ contributions) in order to ensure consistency of delivery over the County;

(e) The County Council’s policy is examined to investigate whether housing associations should be treated differently from developers with regard to contributions;

(f) Central Government is lobbied for a change in their policies and funding streams in relation to affordable housing.

6.2 Use and re-use of locally sourced products

(g) The County Council consider a consistent approach to green procurement and the wider use of the Environmental Management System;
(h) The Portfolio holders for the Economy and Lifelong Learning investigate the shortage of vocational skills for regeneration projects and a report be brought to a future meeting of the Committee on the type of training required, and how it was being provided;

(i) The work of the Integrated Waste Management Strategy Panel on composting within the County to meet necessary targets is supported;

(j) Cornwall Enterprise is requested to facilitate the process of quarries working co-operatively with regard to marketing activities and equipment purchasing;

(k) Matched funding is made available for projects which are developing reuse/recycling markets within the County e.g. ReMade Kernow

(l) Planning policies should:
   (i) encourage farms to grow and produce ‘end’ products;
   (ii) encourage new developers to maximise the use of local products as part of the planning process;
   (iii) assist in the establishment of abattoirs in the County to reduce transportation costs

(m) Support is given to supply chain initiatives within the County in order that better information is available to enable their development.

6.3 Rural business

(n) The County Farms Strategy should be reviewed within the next 12 months, and attention given to ensuring that it takes a flexible approach to reflect current farming circumstances;

(o) Small businesses should receive a “one-stop-shop” approach to accessing funding;

(p) Planning policies should reflect and provide a wider definition of rural and agricultural businesses and advocate a tighter connection between the Structure Plan and the Local Plans;

(q) In recognising the need for youngsters in the sixteen plus age group to progress to vocational occupations and apprenticeships the Lifelong Learning Portfolio holder be asked to challenge the Learning and Skills Council to establish their views on agricultural and vocational training and Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVES);
(r) The cost to the community of creating environmental designated areas is recognised;

(s) All County Council farms should have appropriate signage to raise public awareness of their role;

(t) The Government be lobbied to implement the Rural Development Regulation in the Common Agricultural Policy relating to early retirements or to introduce a similar provision.

The Way Forward

There are a number of ways in which the Panel’s recommendations could be taken forward.

A review of the Economic Development Plan “Strategy in Action” is being undertaken by the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Development and Tourism Forum and should embrace a stronger set of actions relating to the rural economy.

The review of the County Structure Plan is also addressing similar issues and could incorporate more robustly the recommendations suggested for planning policies.

The Executive needs to consider the matters identified and the appropriate Portfolio holder to take forward the issues raised.
The Rural Recovery Single Issue Panel thanks the following for their evidence and assistance:

Association of National Park Authorities
K Barriball Duchy College
S Bucknall Chairman, National Farmers’ Union
A Chandler Devon and Cornwall Housing Association
G Clegg Bosavern Farm
R Daniel Cornwall Association of Parish and Town Councils
Reverend R Greene Cornwall Agricultural Chaplain
S Havers Principal Planning Officer, Cornwall County Council
M M Hawkey Head of Countryside and Historic Environment, Cornwall County Council
T I Horwood Spatial Planning, Cornwall County Council
M A Jones Head of Spatial Planning, Cornwall County Council
Ms V Jones Sustainability Officer, Restormel Borough Council
Mrs P A Lyne Economy Portfolio holder, Cornwall County Council
P R Moore Cornwall Rural Housing Association
D M Pattison Assistant Chief Executive (Economic Development), Cornwall County Council
B Reeve-Fowkes Chief Land Agent and Valuer, Cornwall County Council
Mrs H V Richards Member of the Structure Plan Monitoring and Review Panel and an Estate Agent
J Walkers Cornwall Federation of Young Farmers’ Clubs
P Walsh LA21 Officer, Kerrier District Council
A Weight LA21 Officer, Cornwall County Council

The Panel would also like to thank Mrs A Davey – Committee Administrator and M Perry - Policy Development Manager (Scrutiny) for their support in the organisation of the Panel’s work.