

## Case Study

### Clun Forest 'Land, Life & Livelihoods' Project



#### Summary

The Land, Life and Livelihoods project aims to explore and demonstrate how farmers and the Clun Forest community can work together to sustain their strong sense of community, their quality of life, unique environment, landscape and wildlife and thriving healthy farms for everyone's future.

#### What has been done

Consultation and events in 2005 through 'Down to Earth in the Clun Forest' (run by the AONB's Blue Remembered Hills Project) highlighted how much people valued all aspects of the special rural landscape and community of the Clun Forest. Support from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) enabled further consultation work with local farmers who were under-represented in the initial project. Personal interviews (mostly carried out by other farmers) were used to identify farmers' values, concerns, ideas and hopes for the future. Particular concerns were for the future viability of small and medium sized family farms, for the conservation of the peace and beauty of the Clun Forest and for maintaining its strong and caring community.

In 2006 -7, with further SDF support, the group began to tackle the farming and landscape issues raised, to develop farmer confidence and seek home grown solutions built on grassroots support. Events focussed on practical advice and examples for farmers, making links with organisations involved in policy and funding, and building links with the wider community:

- Visits to the Pont Bren farmers group in Wales, and the Peak District
- Two planning events – with South Shropshire District Council and the AONB
- Links with West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum and Advantage West Midlands
- River Clun Events
- Farmers Meetings, farm visits, and a ladies evening with Mainstone and Bettws WI
- Four 'Green Futures' events for farmers run in conjunction with the Rural Hub – on cross compliance, soil protection, waste regulations and livestock ID and record keeping.

**13 farmer events held with total of 334 participants. 105 farming families on database with regular mailings. 67 attended one or more events, 26 attended more than 3 events.**



## Social benefits

- Strong farmer network formed, with links to the wider community and policy makers
- Basis for further work, including means for planning authority to consult in a deeply rural area
- Genuine consultation, capacity building, development of social capital

## Environmental benefits

- Training for farmers on cross compliance and environmental regulations
- Focus on the River Clun as a key asset
- Launch of the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group – attended by over 100 people
- Basis for farmer consultation in Natural England Multiple Objectives project (NEMO)

## Economic benefits

- Shared vision for the economic future of the area
- Collaborative marketing group formed to develop local supply of organic meat
- Links with Rural Hub and potential to develop projects under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)



## Lessons

- A non-directive approach at the start, focussing on what is important to local people, is vital to get the community engaged. We must be careful not to swamp the people who have shaped this landscape, and to LISTEN to them.
- Different methods are required to get farmers involved in a sparsely populated upland area. One to one discussions are important. Informality is the key to success in meetings – relaxed local venues, refreshments, sociable, straightforward language, no jargon!
- Skilled facilitation and funding is vital to build networks, trust and relationships. Without this targeted input, the needs of areas which are peripheral and economically vulnerable are easily overlooked by policy makers.
- Many organisations are focussed on diversification, but the continued survival of farming and livestock in particular is key to maintaining the landscape of the Clun Forest.

**“Our Down to Earth initiative is steadily encompassing most sustainability issues and our objectives for farming, wildlife and landscape closely mirror those of the AONB.”**  
Land, Life & Livelihoods SDF Project report, March 2007

## Further information

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