

## LGA Rural Commission and Annual Rural Conference

4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> September 2007

Riviera International Conference Centre, Torquay, Devon.

Delegates were welcomed to both the Commission and the Conference by the Chairman of the Rural Commission Cllr Andrew Bowles Leader of Swale Borough Council. Cllr Bowles announced the appointment of Office Holders, appointments to the Rural Policy review group, membership of the Commission 2007/8 and the Commissions priorities for 2007/8

The theme this year was Shaping Rural Places. What does the future hold for rural areas and how can councils meet the challenges?

The first speaker was Cllr. Jim Harker Vice Chair of the LGA Regeneration and Transport Board. He spoke about the Boards work programme and its priorities particularly focussing on transport.

The next speaker was Peter Bungard Chief Executive of Gloucester County Council. He talked about dealing with flooding and its aftermath. Flooding caused widespread disruption in the areas affected and will have long term consequences for local communities. He explained to the delegates how Gloucestershire's emergency plans worked in practice and the lessons for the future.

The Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013 was the presentation from Claire Lewis of the RDPE Implementation team DEFRA. £3.9 billion available during the next RDPE (2007-2013) will be used to safeguard and enhance the rural environment ( with Environmental Stewardship central)and to foster competitive and sustainable businesses and thriving communities. Ms Lewis gave an update on the planning and roll out of the RDPE.

Chris Huhne MP Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He gave The Liberal Democrat's vision for place shaping of rural communities. He outlined the Liberal Democrats paper on ' A Fair Future for Rural England'

Alistair Burt MP the Conservative Shadow Minister for communities and Local Government. He spoke about shaping rural places- the Conservative Vision He talked about removing regional assemblies and said that ' we think capping has run its course'.

Productivity and prosperous rural communities was the theme of Tom Allen the Programme Director of Local Government Analysis and Research.

Jonathan Shaw MP the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of state and Minister for the South-East, Defra. The theme of his talk was helping and empowering rural communities to tackle climate change.

There followed presentations on a number of topics including strengthening the role of local councillors, facing up to climate change, the Government's perspective, and the local response to climate change.

Workshop Sessions.

The Future of Post Office Services.

Speakers were Sue Huggins of the Post Office Ltd. and Howard Webber of PostWatch Ltd. Of great interest to all those present especially those from Kent Sue Huggins was given a very hard time and did little to endear herself to the delegates.

Access and opportunities for young people

The Draft Local Transport Bill – implications for rural areas

“Productivity and Place” – What does the City Region Agenda Mean for Rural Areas?

Shaping service delivery in rural areas

Why farming matters- the environmental stewardship role of farmers

Delivering affordable housing

The future of land use

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