

RURAL CULTURAL FORUM

A Cultural Strategy for Rural England:

Investing in Rural Community Creativity and Cultural Capital

A Discussion paper

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Background

The Rural Cultural Forum and proposed Cultural Strategy for Rural England are among the outcomes of a two year Arts Council England funded study: *Investing in Rural Creativity; New Rural Arts Strategy, 2001 - 2003*. This proposed a new role for the arts sector in support of the Government's *Rural Strategy* (DEFRA, 2004), including rural community development, social inclusion and economic regeneration priorities. It also discussed these ideas in terms of framing a wider arts and sustainability strategy, in response to climate change and the radical changes in the farming and agricultural sector driven by CAP reform. The report also advocated the establishment of Cultural Forum for rural communities in England (including the fishing port communities) and encouraged the urban arts and rural communities to work together to develop a coordinated arts and cultural strategy in support of the Government's rural regeneration programmes.

Rural community creativity and cultural capital

The report also listed practical examples of how the arts are already supporting community development, rural regeneration, sustainable communities, and social and economic inclusion initiatives in rural areas. It further identified the coordinates of an emergent 'New Rural Arts' tradition which includes: arts-led urban/rural cultural diversity and creative business partnerships; arts support for the work of rural health care agencies and rural health initiatives; creative work with rural children and young people; promoting wider access to the arts for people with disabilities, and for women and rural elders. Other potential new areas include digital rural arts and new media, and development of creative rural industries. The report further highlighted the considerable creative potential, entrepreneurial capacity and cultural capital that currently remains locked up within rural, farming and fishing communities, and recommended a range of new cultural actions and arts investment to help mobilise and deploy these untapped creative resources. It also highlighted the potential of new rural audiences for the arts, and advocated new investment for rural arts and cultural traditions as a vital part of the nation's social, cultural and economic fabric.

Cultural Entitlement for rural communities?

The Arts Council recently published its priorities for the future of the arts in rural England: *'Arts in Rural England – the arts at the heart of rural life'* in November 2005. While the Arts Council is in principle supportive of the artistic needs and cultural aspirations of rural communities, its funding and arts development priorities are more concerned with supporting professional artists and arts organisations, and in developing new audiences for high quality arts in rural areas. Partly for this reason the Arts Council's report did not fully address the matter of rural community Cultural Entitlement, or argue for new arts investment to support vital community-led rural regeneration, social inclusion, and cultural capital programmes. In this context the RCF is now proposing to go ahead with development of a coordinated rural cultural strategy capable of engaging and involving all sectors of the arts, media and cultural communities (both urban and rural) in support of the Government's rural regeneration initiatives, and the other priorities as set out by the Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett, in the *Rural Strategy* (DEFRA, 2004).

Urban Culture programme and the coalfields as precedents

Some urban examples may help to explain how a rural cultural investment strategy could be funded and implemented in practice. Because they were well organised, and presented a united front, the former coalfields communities have been particularly effective in attracting significant Government and EU funds (and Arts Council funding) to help them manage the process of social, economic and cultural change within their respective home areas. This is in addition to the millions of Heritage and Arts Lottery funds that have been directed in support of other urban communities and arts-led urban regeneration initiatives over the past ten years (e.g. the BALTIC in Newcastle and Panopticons project, East Lancashire). While rural communities have also benefited from Lottery arts, heritage and cultural funds, the actual percentage for community-led rural regeneration projects is undocumented, but it is likely to be quite low in comparison to the total urban cultural spend.

More recently the Millennium Commission, in the process of winding up its main funding programmes, uncovered an underspend. Following discussions with Arts Council England this was combined with other arts funds and £15 million of new arts investment was made available to selected UK cities, as a supplementary Urban Cultural fund specifically for urban culture programmes and arts-led urban regeneration. Unfortunately, no thought was ever given to the needs of the rural community or for investment in rural cultural capital, or of the considerable potential of the arts in supporting the regeneration of the rural economy. By contrast the Rural Cultural Forum has to date received in total £5,000 from Arts Council England to support its activities and promote cultural investment in rural England.

Parity of cultural investment; the 10% proposition

The RCF and the leaders of the rural community are resolved to redress this imbalance and are now asking for an equivalent level of investment and parity in terms of leverage of new arts and cultural funding and support for the rural sector. This means a genuine commitment to achieving an equity of investment and Cultural Entitlement for all rural communities in England on the part of the lead statutory and funding agencies; DCMS, ACE, DEFRA and Commission for Rural Communities. Given the enormity of the task and the radical nature of the social, economic and environmental challenges now confronting rural communities, it seems not unreasonable to consider fixing the level of new cultural investment for rural communities initially at about 10% of the total amount of cultural funding awarded the cities and arts-led urban regeneration programmes over the past five years.

Entitlement also means responsibility

Cultural Entitlement also of course implies that the recipient communities take on responsibility for their future development and sustainability. In this regard the rural and farming communities are already taking on the responsibility for managing the processes of social and economic change within their own sectors. Given the urban cultural precedents cited above, a well coordinated and resourced cultural investment strategy for rural England would enable rural communities to respond creatively and imaginatively to the Government's radical challenges, in terms of; rethinking their economies and the restructuring of the agricultural sector, tackling the impact of climate change, and also give them the confidence to plan ahead for the future sustainable rural settlements, landscapes and economies, post-CAP.

A Cultural Strategy for Rural England

Following on from this the RCF is proposing a two strand cultural strategy for Rural England designed to secure new arts investment for rural England and cultural entitlement for all its rural communities:

- 1 Rural Cultural Forum** Establishment of a Rural Community Cultural Forum to provide a dedicated networking and funding agency for rural communities and support organisations in England.
- 2 Creative rural communities and economies R&D programme** Development of a supporting programme of research, development and advocacy, with the aim of securing cultural funding and entitlement for creative rural communities.

Rural Cultural Forum - Mission Statement

The Rural Cultural Forum is a coalition of rural and community organisations promoting rural culture in England. It campaigns for arts and cultural investment in rural creativity, and in support of rural economic regeneration and social inclusion, and rural/urban reconnection.

Aims and Objectives

The main aims and objectives of the RCF are to:

- a Frame and deliver a cultural strategy for rural communities in England.
- b Provide an advocacy, information and support network for rural community creativity, arts and culture.
- c Liaise with and advise the statutory art and rural agencies on the cultural entitlement of rural communities, and on arts provision for rural areas (cultural proofing); and to promote the role of the arts in support of the Rural Strategies economic regeneration, quality of life, and social justice priorities.
- d Promote and foster a socially inclusive and culturally diverse rural culture, heritage, and countryside.
- e Foster new urban/rural reconnections through cultural and arts activities.
- f Apply arts and cultural resources to promote new rural employment and economic opportunities through rural creative industries.
- g Engage the arts and cultural community in support of rural community development and regeneration at all levels.
- h Promote a new role for the arts in support of rural tourism, farm diversification, craft and food marketing initiatives.
- i Reinforce rural community identity, sense of place and social cohesion, and in support of education and skills, health, well-being, and social welfare.
- j To undertake, monitor and evaluate a programme of research, development and fund raising activities in support of the above objectives (including conferences, exhibitions, media events, workshops and practical arts projects).

Rural Cultural forum members and associates*

Organisations who have expressed an interest in becoming full members, or propose to attend as associated members of the Rural Cultural Forum

Action for Community Councils in Rural England (ACRE);
Arthur Rank Centre - ARC
African Women's Art and Rural Development - AWAD
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Church of England (Rural Churches)
Country Landowners and Business Association (CLA)
Small and Family Farmers Association (SFFA)
Farming and Countryside Education (FACE)
Framework for Change (F4C Sustainable Farming and Food, Yorkshire)
Institute of Rural Health/Rural Health Forum (IRH)
Kala Sangam (Bradford based South Asian Arts group with strong rural links)
LEADER+ UK network
Livestock Foundation
National Association of Local Government Arts Officers (NALGAO)
National Farmers Union (NFU)
National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs (NFYFC)
Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI)
Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE)
Rural Media Company, Hereford
RuralNet
Rural Youth Forum
Rural Stress Information Network (RSIN)
Tenant Farmers Association (TFA)
The Soil Association
Women in Rural Enterprise (WIRE)
Womens Food and Farming Union (WFU)

**Fishing port community representatives will also be invited*

Observers:

Arts Council England

DCMS,

DEFRA

Commission for Rural Communities

Cultural Proofing the Rural Agenda; integrating arts and rural policies

The Rural Cultural Forum proposes to open up a new dialogue and partnership with the Commission for Rural Communities, DCMS, the Arts Council and DEFRA, and, where appropriate, to advise them on matters relating to rural cultural capital, cultural entitlement, and future arts funding for rural communities. Cultural Proofing the rural agenda: the Forum will also encourage the statutory and voluntary rural support organisations to continue to work closely with the arts, and to make greater use of the arts and culture sectors, skills and resources in delivery of some of their mainstream rural community development and economic regeneration programmes.

Rural Cultural Summit conference, Tate Britain, 23rd May 2006.

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell (Minister of State at DCMS) and Jim Knight Rural Minister DEFRA are supportive in principle of a cultural strategy for rural England. The conference will be introduced by Dr Stephen Deuchar Director of Tate Britain and chaired by Dr Graham Burgess, the Government's Rural Advocate and Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities

The main purpose of the Summit is to bring together the lead stake holders for the arts, culture and rural/fishing communities to discuss the aims and objectives, proposed funding, implementation mechanisms and outputs for the rural cultural strategy in more detail. It will raise the issue of Cultural Entitlement and the need for parity of arts and cultural investment for rural communities, and will also seek agreement on the outlines of a coordinated five year arts and cultural investment and development strategy for Rural England. Tate Britain have expressed an interest in working with the Rural Cultural Forum, and have offered to host the conference in their prestigious Clore auditorium. More details about the conference date, programme, proposed speakers and agenda will be available in due course.

The RCF proposes to organise Rural Cultural Summits on an annual basis, and alongside these develop a supporting programme of regional rural arts conferences and research seminars, aimed at supporting new work and further connecting the urban arts sector with rural communities and related research work on rural issues.

Rural Cultural Strategy proposed research and development programme

The topics and projects listed under are currently under consideration or being developed by the RCF as the basis for a coordinated rural cultural strategy. Most of these ideas were outlined in some detail in the original Arts Council England '*Investing in Rural Creativity*' report (published in October, 2003). N.B. Although the conferences and research topics listed under refer mostly to 'rural' and 'farming' Communities, it is understood that these opportunities and support proposals will apply equally to the fishing communities.

However, these projects are currently beyond the capacity and institutional resources of the RCF to attempt to deliver on its own. They are listed here as possible future R&D projects or as partnerships proposals or further discussion, and to give some idea of the potential scope and efficacy of a Rural Cultural Strategy in terms of opening up this exciting new area of arts development work, and related cultural policy research work and investment.

1. *Audit of Rural Community Cultural Capital and Rural Arts Provision*

The Rural Cultural Forum has taken the concepts of 'Cultural Entitlement' and 'Rural Cultural Capital' as priorities for study and research. A full audit of Rural Community Cultural Capital (and a related in-depth study of arts and cultural provision/needs in rural areas) is urgently required in order to generate a strong evidence base from which to secure future arts and cultural funding for rural communities. A draft outline for the proposed audit of Rural Cultural Capital is currently being prepared for consultation with rural community leaders, and arts and rural agencies. This will be presented for discussion at the Rural Cultural Summit conference in May, and following this will be taken forward as the basis for negotiations with DEFRA, DCMS, the Arts Council, and other potential funders.

2. *Promoting Rural Cultural Diversity through the Arts*

Proposal for a national Arts and Rural Cultural Diversities conference and supporting research programme. Promoting arts-led rural cultural diversity and urban/rural cultural partnerships; surfacing new creative strategies aimed at combating racism in the countryside; working in partnership with African, African Caribbean, South Asian and Asian communities to encourage new urban/rural creative exchanges and business partnerships; developing innovative cultural diversity awareness initiatives in partnership with rural and farming communities; cultural diversity arts and social inclusion work with young people, rural elders and Gypsy/traveller communities; addressing issues about urban incomers, second home owners; and problems associated with gang-masters and exploitation of immigrant labour in rural areas; working in partnerships with other Countryside Agency, local authority, CRE and Mosaic (National Parks) sponsored rural cultural diversity projects and research. These and other ideas will be outlined at RCF sponsored *Rural Diversities and Sustainable Communities Conference* proposed for Bradford in October 2006

3. *Rural Design and Architecture: promoting the new rural design economy*

Working with leading urban architects, artists, craft workers and designers to imagine and develop the new design-led rural businesses and built forms in the rural environment. Rethinking rural community design, designs for affordable rural housing, and towards a new design aesthetic and code for the post-CAP rural landscapes, settlements and creative rural economies. The RCF has already organised a preliminary two day Rural Design conference, at DEFRA's CSL conference centre, York in July 2005. Following this negotiations are under way with the Design Council, CABE, RIBA, the Arts Council and Crafts Council to develop a future conference and new research focused on a national rural design and architecture initiative. The plan includes proposals to stage the first EU/International Rural Design Biennale, and a related experimental architecture and agriculture symposium in Yorkshire in 2009. The inaugural meeting of the *Rural Design Forum* will take place at the RIBA HQ London in early July 2008

4. *Creative Rural Economies: the arts and rural regeneration.*

Rural Cultural Forum and UK LEADER+ sponsored *Creative Rural Industries – Arts and Rural Regeneration* international conference and exhibitions programme (10–13 September, 2006, University of Lancaster, Lancashire). Promoting new investment in the creative skills, imaginative and cultural resources of rural

communities; engaging the urban arts, media and design sectors in support of rural economic regeneration and social inclusion; promoting new arts and media-led rural creative industries, rural media, ICT and the digital rural economy; arts and market towns, rural cultural tourism and farm foods marketing initiatives; mobilising rural community creativity and cultural potential as engines for economic recovery; promoting new design, textiles/smart clothing and fashion businesses in rural communities. The conference is currently under development by the Rural Cultural Forum/Littoral in partnership with Arts Council England, LEADER+, Culture NW, and Lancashire Economic Partnership.

5. *Arts and Rural Health: arts support for rural health care initiatives*

Developing new arts projects in support of rural health care and health education; creative arts work with rural community hospitals, doctors and rural health care providers, and PCTs; documenting new arts-led farm health projects, and addressing the social, health and psychological impact of FMD on rural communities. The RCF is also sponsoring the *Cultural Documents of FMD* international conference and exhibition, at Manchester Town Hall (14 – 16, March, 2006). Arts support for rural stress, rural community mental health care, rural disability access, and arts and health education projects with rural young people, women, farmers and rural elders. Proposal for a national arts and rural health conference and research programme currently being discussed in partnership with the Rural Health Forum.

6. *Arts and Rural Social inclusion; art for rural children and young people*

Proposed research project and conference focused on arts deliver for rural social inclusion initiatives, including a particular focus on the creative needs and cultural aspirations of rural youth and children, and determining the scope of arts provision currently available to children and young people in rural areas. Arts work with young people promoting rural social inclusion, using the arts to enhance and expand their educational, skills development and new employment opportunities. Proposal for a national rural youth and arts exhibition and festival; identifying future needs and opportunities, advocating new arts resources and cultural provision for rural youth and children. Possible future national conference and research programme for further discussion with the NCB (Rural Children and Young People's unit), FACE, Rural Youth Forum and NFYFC.

7 *Rural Voices: promoting rural community media, oral culture and literacy*

Research and development towards a future national conference aimed at promoting new creative and cultural uses of rural community broadcasting, advanced telecommunications and ICT in promoting rural literacy, oral arts, broadcasting and cultural communications. Other conferences and R&D projects being considered include *The Pen and the Plough – rewriting the rural and agriculture*; new writing, poetry, theatre and performing arts initiatives in support of rural and agricultural communities undergoing radical social, environmental and economic change. *RAMP - Rural Arts and Media Platform*, establishment of a national rural media and arts network and supporting pedagogy and research programme; *Rural Voices* coordination of a international rural broadcasting/arts and new media convergence conference, as a spring board for future community radio and training initiative for farming, arts and rural communities in England.

Integrating satellite, webcasting, and community broadcasting technologies and new training and employment opportunities for rural communities and artists.

8 *New Rural Crafts: a new role for the crafts in rural regeneration.*

Researching the experimental and creative interfaces linking the crafts with rural economic and community development. Reconnecting the contemporary crafts with the new creative rural industries, rural design, and the land-based rural economy. The Countryside Agency has recently published a report on the future of the crafts in rural England. This points out that the crafts are a potential major force for economic and social regeneration in the rural sector, and that their economic value may well surpass that of farming and agriculture. The RCF and LITTORAL are now in discussion with the Crafts Council, and Crafts Space Touring and the Countryside Agency about proposals for a future national conference, touring exhibition, and supporting programme of pilot new rural craft R&D projects. These would be aimed at demonstrating new ways in which rural crafts can contribute to delivery of the economic, social and environmental objectives outlined in the Rural Strategy (DEFRA, 2004).

9 *A Rural Cultural Centre and Art Gallery for Rural England*

Almost £100 million has recently been invested in the construction of two brand new international arts and cultural facilities in just one city in England alone; that is, The BALTIC and the SAGE Arts Centre in Gateshead. There are many other such examples; Cardiff, Glasgow, the Lowry in Manchester/Salford, Liverpool European Capital of Culture and, not forgetting the millions now being allocated for the arts and cultural events for Olympic Games in London in 2012. There is now a growing consensus within the rural sector that the time has come to advocate for the establishment of a dedicated national centre for rural culture and the arts in England. A Rural Cultural centre that would be for all communities (urban and rural) to access and enjoy, and would promote and sustain the creative aspirations and rich diversity of all England's rural community arts, crafts, design, architectural, music and cultural traditions. This facility could, for example be located at the National Agricultural Centre near Birmingham, or, better still on the outskirts of Bradford where it could function as a new type of urban rural cultural connections and European Intercultural interface project, and combining advanced research on rural culture, creative rural industries, and other work with BME and urban cultural diversity communities. Other possible functions could include: a national rural arts archive and library; promoting innovative arts-based countryside education, and art and sustainability projects for young people; rural arts media, ICT/cultural projects and community broadcasting training centre; and creative ways of promoting healthy eating and food cultivation for urban and rural communities.

10 *NEW FIELDS – the first Rural Biennale of Art and Agriculture*

The *NEW FIELDS* Art and Agriculture Biennale planned for Yorkshire in 2009, is being promoted as the first international Rural Biennale and as such could also become a prototype for a possible future European Region of Rural Culture and Farmer Creativity. The EU Region of Rural Culture is also conceived of as a stepping stone to Pillar III; and the possibility of new debate centred on an integrated cultural strategy for deliver of EU's rural development programme The Rural Biennale and ERRFCFC are therefore proposed as a complementary cultural investment strategy for rural communities in England, and could further

act as a counter discourse to the almost exclusively metrocentric cultural bias of the Liverpool Biennale and the European Capital of Culture programme in 2008.

There are a number of other rural cultural strategy research and development proposals and conferences under consideration by the RCF, or in the pipeline. Including ideas for: a new *Arts, Agriculture and Sustainability* pedagogy and research programme, aimed at promoting new theoretical, aesthetic and critical discourse on art, agriculture and rural issues, and notions of the post-agricultural, this will be discussed further with the university art schools and agricultural colleges; establishment of a *European Rural Cultural network and forum*, and *CULTURE 3* - proposals for a Pillar III cultural strategy and arts framework for delivery of future EU rural development programmes; and *Curating the Rural*, generating new curatorial and critical art practices suitable for work in challenging rural and agricultural contexts.

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LITTORAL Arts
www.littoral.org.uk