

THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

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1. Purpose

1.1 To report on the establishment of the Countryside Agency with effect from 1 April 1999.

2. Summary

2.1 The Countryside Agency resulted from the merger of the Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Commission.

2.2 The Rural Development Commission, created in 1909, was the agency responsible for advising government on economic and social development in rural England. It aimed to stimulate job creation and the provision of essential services in the countryside.

2.3 The Countryside Commission, created in 1968, was the Government's countryside and landscape adviser. Its aim was to make sure that the English countryside prospered and was protected, and that it could be used and enjoyed now and in the future.

2.4 The merger enables a single body to provide the integrated approach which England's countryside and rural communities require. The Countryside Agency recognises the interdependence that exists between a thriving rural economy, sustainable communities and care and enjoyment of the countryside.

2.5 The broader remit of the Countryside Agency, with its new aims and approaches, gives it more authority than either of the two bodies it replaces. The Vision and Aims of this new Agency are set out in **Annex A** to this report.

3. Recommendations

3.1 This report is for information only.

Background Papers: The Countryside Agency Leaflet

ANNEX A TO ITEM 5
RURAL AFFAIRS
CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY
17 JUNE 1999

THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

How the Agency Works

The Countryside Agency is a statutory body receiving public funds. It has responsibility for advising Government and taking action on issues relating to the environmental, economic and social well-being of the English countryside.

It informs and promotes, experiments and demonstrates, advises and supports, and takes the initiative. And it works in partnership with others.

The Agency has about 400 expert and support staff and a budget of around £50million a year.

Vision

The Countryside Agency has a central role in delivering the Government's vision for the countryside, which has five main themes:

- *a living countryside*, with thriving rural communities in which all residents are included, and in which there is access to services, such as healthcare, schools and shops;
- *a working countryside*, contributing to national prosperity as part of a competitive economy, with a balanced mix of businesses (including land-based industries), jobs and homes, reducing the need to commute long distances;
- *the interdependence of town and country*, and a wish to strengthen the relationships between the two;
- a countryside in which the *environment* is properly protected and its qualities enhanced in a way which sustains the lives of those who live and work there or visit it;
- *a countryside for all*, where there is plentiful access so that the character of the countryside can be enjoyed widely.

Aims

The Agency has the following aims:

- To ensure that public policy takes account of the needs and aspirations of those who live and work in rural areas, and of those who visit or value the countryside, and that objective information about the countryside reaches all who need it.
- To help create and sustain a high quality, living countryside of locally distinctive character, with a dynamic, diversified and sustainable economy which offers a broad range of job opportunities.
- To promote rural communities in which people have choice and opportunity, with reasonable access to jobs, affordable housing and the services they need; and to improve access to the countryside so that all who live in towns and cities have the opportunity to enjoy it.

- To ensure that everyone can enjoy the physical, educational and spiritual benefits of recreation and tourism in the countryside in ways which conserve the environment, provide jobs, strengthen the economy and improve the health of the nation.