(Re)defining Rural Places

Discussion Summary

The following points were raised during the day:

The characteristics of (rural) places

- The importance of place in providing people with a sense of identity.
- Strong attachment to the heritage and community of place (e.g. former mining areas).
- The rural economy is not just tourism.
- UNESCO designation recognises the contemporary nature of place, and not as somewhere frozen in time = notion of living landscapes. http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/

People/communities in (rural) places

- Promoting place through social enterprise - but there needs to be overarching strategic planning about what should happen and where.
- People in rural places have entrepreneurial drive and ambition - people drive places.
- National Forest example - communities see themselves as living in the forest and recognise the opportunities this brings (e.g. jobs). http://www.nationalforest.org/forest/onyourdoorstep/
- The place is only as good as the people living there - you need to be able to live there and the place needs to be of worth to the local community (a living working place) otherwise is just becomes a scenic area.
- Young people are disengaged with / leaving rural areas - and we need to start focusing on this if we are to have thriving rural places in the future.
- How can we encourage social enterprise capital in rural places?
- How can we ensure social enterprises and Community Interest Companies (CICs) are sustainable? The personal commitment of rural residents in keeping things in their local area going and not reaching burn out.

Land management

- People don't understand land management - I.e., history, traditions and physical characteristics - and this can lead to conflict between local communities and stakeholders.
- Most people don't know who owns the land around them unless the landowner wants to make change = people need to understand patterns of ownership and what might happen under those owners. Who owns the land around your house?

Spatial planning / planning policy, neighbourhood plans and localism

- Tensions around building housing on green belt and in designated landscapes (e.g. AONB, National Parks).
- The tyranny of landscape assessment - things are done to people living in a landscape.
- Hampshire County Council undertakes Integrated Landscape Character Assessments (i.e., what the landscape means to people living in a place). https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/environment/landscape/integratedcharacterassessment
- The localism trend will continue as we have to rely on ourselves to a greater extent.

- o Neighbourhood planning - what people want to bring into the plan (the process can be community friendly and it can change people's sense of identity and bring together different groups within the community). In some places though the plan can be contested. The plan can be haphazard - why is the plan being undertaken, do communities have the capacity and resources to do a plan? = Equity. How can you support community aspirations? You need a mix of participation in a plan rather than it being driven by a single issue.
- o Garden grabbing - residents obtaining planning permission to build a house in their garden.

Thinking rural?
- o People in central and local government need the right skills (engagement, empathy) to go out and talk to local communities. Face to face engagement/consultation with local communities is important.
- o We need to look at smaller areas of land and smaller groups of people rather than large swathes - but the incentive is to scale up and rural is at the bottom of the investment pot. This will lead to an increasing reliance on people to do things on their own account.
- o The impact of Brexit on upland communities - where 60-95% of farmers may go out of business without CAP payments. What impact will this have on the landscape and local communities? Will land be abandoned? What are we prepared to pay for (e.g. landscape views, environmental goods and services, cultural and heritage links)? What will happen to commoners and their property rights? There are lots more property rights out there than most people are aware of.
- o We don't actually know what will happen with Brexit and there are lots of other undercurrents and trends (e.g. ageing farmers and lack of new entrants in upland farming).
- o Policy makers consider issues in isolation rather than alongside each other (e.g. do you want farmland managed for birds or food?)
- o People are beginning to understand their place - but there's a lack of understanding of rural by policy makers and of the physical processes of place.
- o Flood grants were available from central government to help rural businesses recover - but this didn't cover farmland, why?
- o How to enable compromise and find acceptable community solutions in rural places.
- o What is the relationship between (national) 'big data' and local rural places?
- o Using the sustainable livelihoods approach as a planning tool to stop the spiral of decline in upland areas (i.e., identifying capital/assets/skills/resources, what factors constrain you from doing something, what are the policy instruments that stop you from doing something, what ideas do you have to become more self-reliant and what are you going to do?) http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233
- o Place based sustainable uplands (thinking about local solutions not a one size fits all approach).
- o Making trade-offs in rural (e.g. reintroducing beavers or Lynx will have implications for farmers).