

Farming at the rural-urban fringe: new opportunity spaces for UK agriculture?

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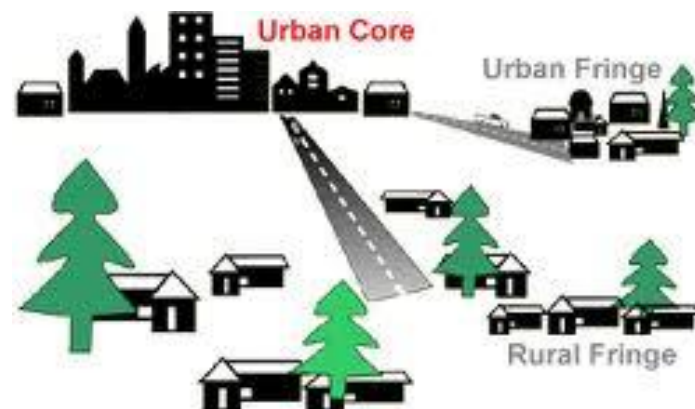
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Rural Economy and
Land Use Programme

Plan

1. Where we are now;
2. Our (inter-disciplinary) approach;
3. Where we need to be and how we get there;
4. Some conclusions



1. Where we are now

Faces of the Fringe

- Innovative
- Edgelands
- Transitional
- Fuzzy
- Messy
- Reactionary
- Ad-hoc
- Diverse
- Dynamic
- Neglected
- Valued
- Contested



Academic Commentary

- Dominant space of 20C
(Mckenzie, 1996)
- Misunderstood space (Gallent et al 2006)
- A transition phase/edge 'placeless' (Qvistrom, 2005)
- Fringe as a 'weed' (Cresswell 1997)
- Battleground for urban and rural uses (Hough, 1990)
- "Landscape out of order" (Qvistrom 2007)

Key Attributes of the RUF

- Multifunctional environment;
- Dynamic environment;
- Low-density economic activity;
- Untidy landscape.

Deconstructing the RUF

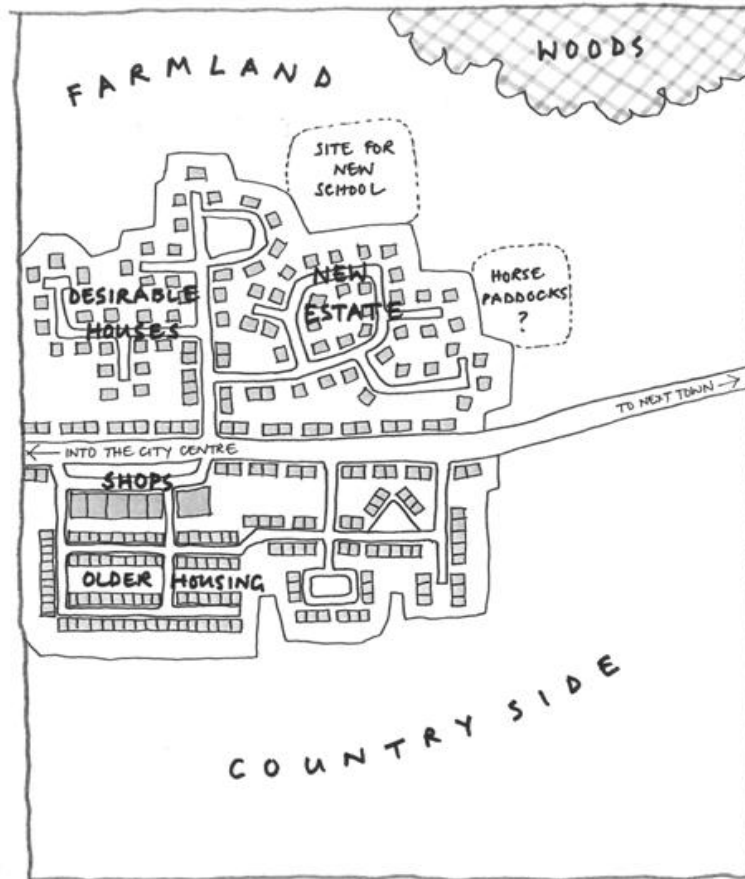
(Worthwhile or complex & self-defeating? – Ravetz, 2010)

- Many definitions;
- Many layers of influence;
- Wide variety of stakeholders;
- Levels of complexity, innovation, transition and emergence.

Differing Perceptions



WHAT A FARMER SEES FROM THE AIR



WHAT A 'TOWNER' SEES FROM THE AIR

Dualism in the RUF

- Green Belt: reactive and protectionist; and
- Wider countryside: increased development pressure



The RUF problem

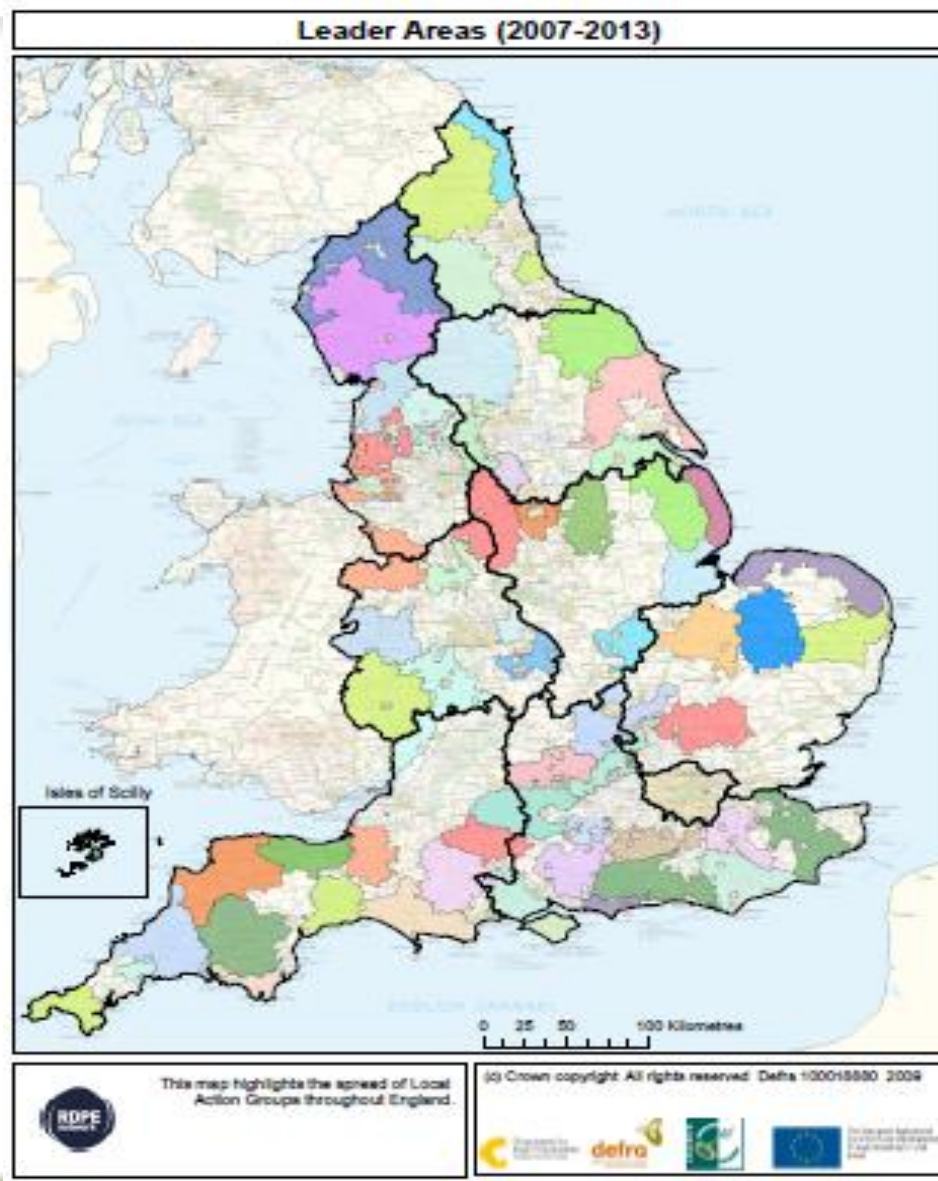
- Sense of place v placelessness;
- Protectionism prevents positive change;
- Agricultural interests bypassed in policy terms (set to continue with neighbourhood planning?)

What agriculture means to us

- Sustainable intensification: increasing production while lessening impact;
- Contributing to global food security (c 9bn by 2050);
- We need:
 - New technologies
 - New farm management practices
 - Promotion of existing knowledge and best practice
 - Focus on bigger picture allied with support for individual businesses

Support for farm diversification - 1

- Mostly left to LEADER, which means:
 - Large parts of rural England (including much of RUF) do not benefit at all;
 - Variable support within LEADER areas;
 - Variable effectiveness;
 - Variable evidence base and local engagement;
 - Disadvantaged groups in most need are also least able to exploit the help on offer.



Support for farm diversification - 2

We need:

- A shift from axis 4 to axis 3 to ensure national delivery; and
- Appropriate application of Defra 'rural' definition to ensure that peri-urban areas benefit.

Separation at Birth (1947)

- Town & Country Planning Act
- Agriculture Act
- Connections between spatial planning and the ecosystems approach poorly developed

2. Our (inter-disciplinary) approach

An interdisciplinary approach to the built environment



- Improve theoretical lens through which we can view both the processes, drivers and dynamics of change in the RUF

The Team

Interdisciplinary (academic & practitioners):

- Social scientists
- Natural scientists
- Economists
- Planners
- Farmers
- Community champions
- Ecologists
- Policy representatives
- Environmentalists
- Geographers
- Urban & rural specialists
- Consultants

Deliberations

- Meetings
- Conference calls
- MS Sharepoint & email

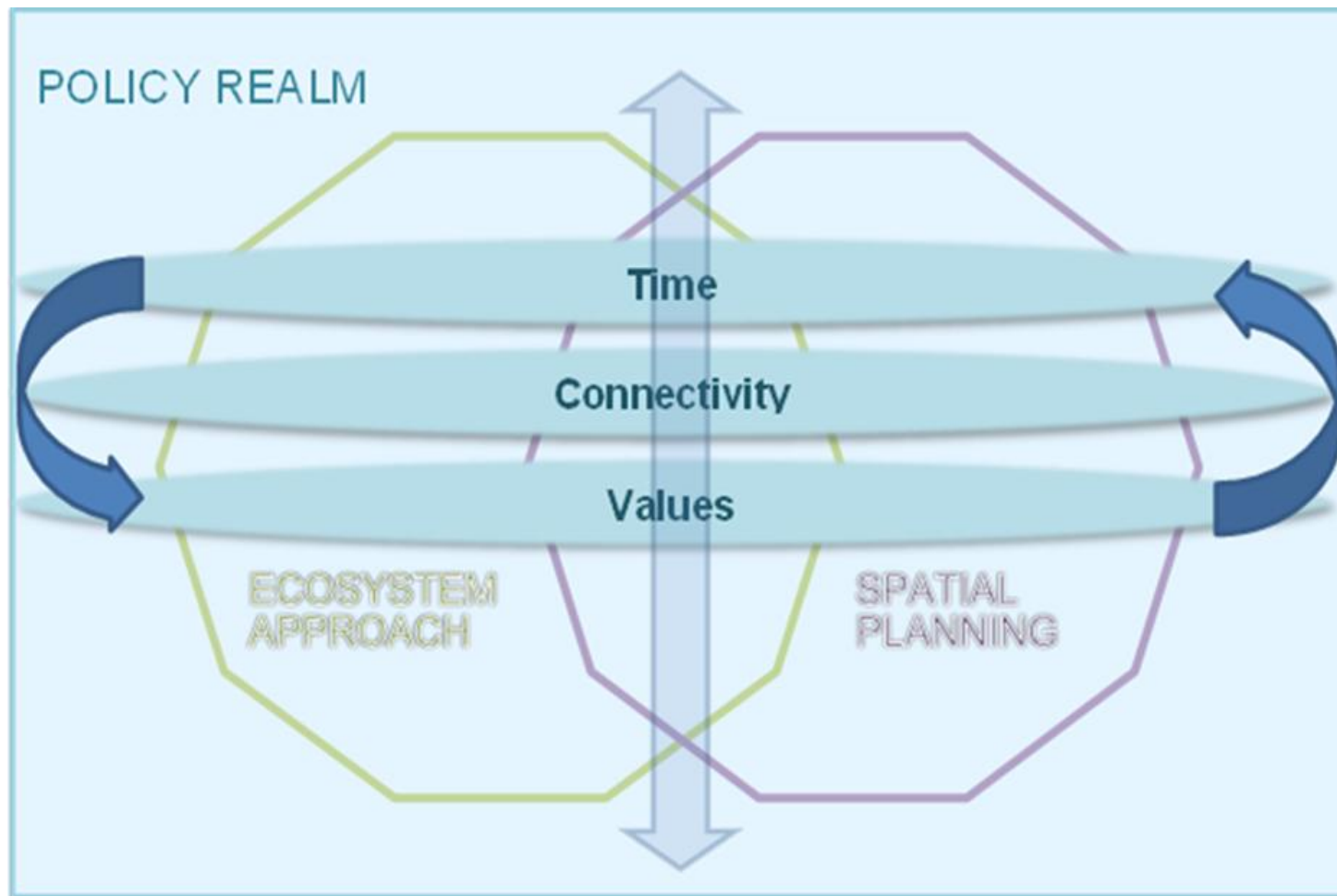
Research Process

- Fuzzy start;
- Collectively unpack and decide trajectory via collaboration and deliberation;
- Goal: uniting spatial planning and the ecosystem approach to make an improved lens;
- An organic process with no preordained milestones.

Iterative Phases

- Team members produced reflective papers based on expertise and experience;
- Conventional literature reviews;
- State of knowledge assessments (internal working papers);
- Three bridging concepts: improving connectivity, long termism, values;
- More accessible & intelligible concepts.

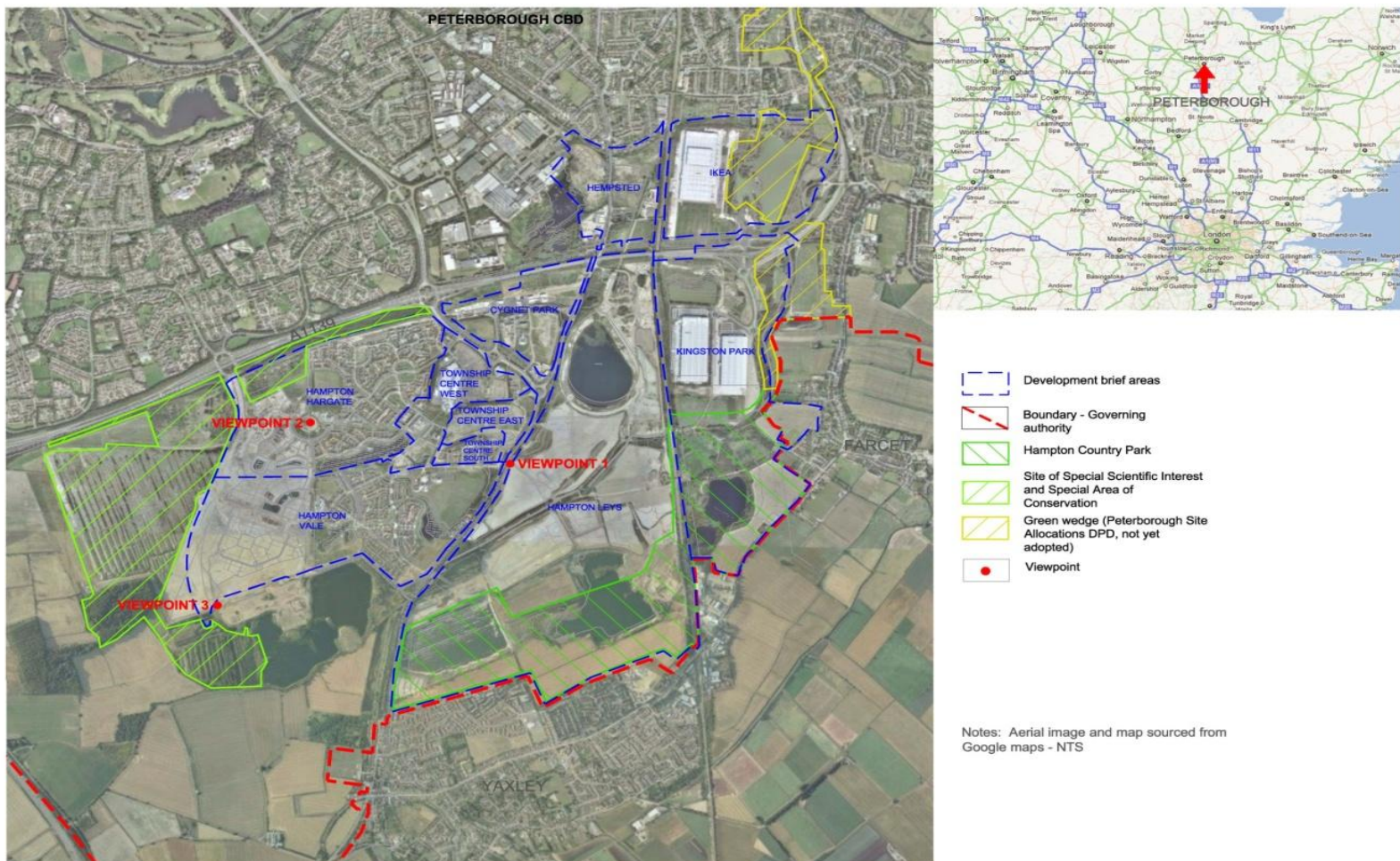
Policy Realm Diagram



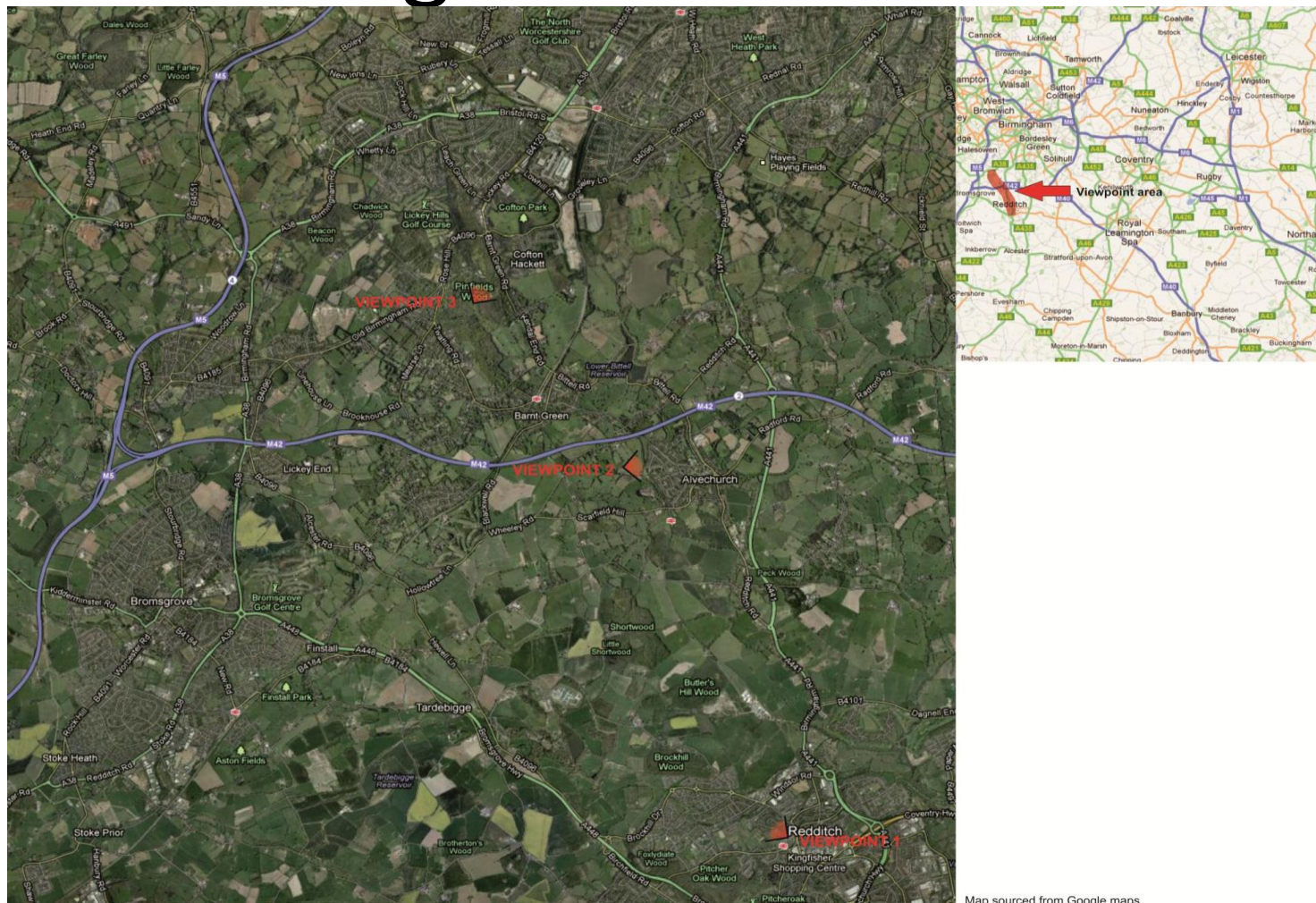
Two Evidence Bases

- Visioning exercises in two contrasting RUFs involving policy and community participants; and
- Themed workshops identified by members of the research team.

Visioning Exercise 1: Hampton



Visioning Exercise 2: N Worcs



Map sourced from Google maps

From Redditch to Birmingham



Workshops



- 1. West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum** Improving decision making for the sustainable management of the RUF; 25 participants
- 2. Green Economics Institute** Long Termism and Valuation in the Built Environment: the RUF and Land Use; 65 participants
- 3. Birmingham Environmental Partnership** Bridging the rural urban divide; 88 participants
- 4. Localise West Midlands Meeting** Local needs with local resources in the rural urban fringe; 15 participants
- 5. BCU** Learning the lessons from Strategic planning: resurrecting institutional memories; 14 participants
- 6. Forest Research** Values and Decision making; 8 participants

Recurring Themes

- The importance and role of agriculture; and
- Green Belt policies and how they are applied.

Agriculture is...

- ...key to feeding the nation;
- ...especially within local supply chains;
- ...the activity that looks after the countryside and makes it suitable for leisure/recreation;
- ...a benign alternative to more 'alien' development;
- ...a threat to the countryside, particularly habitat;
- ...a source of energy; and/or
- ...hampered by restrictive planning policies.

Green Belt Views

- Subject to reactive and protectionist policies;
- Policies rarely address wider opportunities in the RUF and exacerbate development pressures elsewhere;
- Planning essentially reactive to dev't pressure, largely unconcerned with forward thinking or positive management; and
- Agricultural change & diversification both encouraged and resisted through marked failure of policy coordination.

Green Belt Purposes Distorted

“..... Green Belt just protects now very affluent commuter belt settlements This culture of negativity and restriction restricts freedom of manoeuvre for planners and the development industry”.

West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum

Policy Brief Videos

- Our findings were presented in a series of policy brief videos, shown at a dissemination conference held on 29 February 2012:
 - Long termism;
 - Values; and
 - Connectivity.
- These can be downloaded – details in our paper.

3. Where we need to be and how we get there

How Agriculture needs to Reposition Itself



- CAP reform critical to the evolution of agricultural policy in England;
- Lisbon Treaty means EP/Council of Ministers have co-decision;
- Political negotiations delayed by budget discussions; not now expected to begin in earnest until after 1 January 2013;
- NFU concerns include capping, increased bureaucracy and reduced market orientation – and hence more reliance on CAP support.

Do Farmers need to Diversify?

- Factors include:
 - Farm type;
 - Farm size;
 - Farm location.
- Tourism predominates in uplands, retailing in the RUF;
- The smallest farms are commonly part-time, leaving little scope for non-agricultural, farm-based enterprises.

National Planning Policy Framework



- Presumption in favour of sustainable development (Res 24/187 of UN General Assembly & UK SD Strategy);
- (Local plans should) ‘promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses’;
- Threats include Local Green Spaces;
- Uncertainties: transitional period, weight attached to economic growth.

Neighbourhood Planning

- Very local level;
- More housing but not less;
- Design;
- Opportunities for on-farm development?
- Local Green Space.

Farming in the Fringe – an Alternative Model

- Challenges: bisected farmland, trespass, vandalism, fly tipping;
- Opportunities: improved connections with nearby urban population via community involvement, e.g. Todmorden approach.

4. Some Conclusions

Conclusions

- Opportunity space for rural-driven change;
- Multiple beneficiaries;
- Multi-functional strategy;
- Challenge one-size-fits-all solutions;
- New Green Belt approach;
- National delivery of diversification support;
- Todmorden approach