

MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AT THE RURAL URBAN FRINGE

NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER 2010
ISSUE 01



Have you ever wondered about those spaces where town meets country? These spaces are among the most treasured yet poorly understood places within the UK. This research answers three fundamental questions. How is this “rural fringe” changing and why? And how can we more effectively understand and manage change in places of such uncertainty, diversity and transition?

‘The spaces where countryside meets town are often amongst society’s most valued places yet, arguably, lack sufficient understanding and integrated management within the UK’.

Dr Alister Scott, 2010

Welcome to the first newsletter for the Managing Environmental Change at the Rural Urban Fringe project.

The project is funded by the RELU¹ initiative which is a consortium of BBSRC², ESRC³, NERC⁴ and EPSRC⁵ together with support from LWECC⁶.

This interdisciplinary project will undertake research to inform future policy and practice across the UK addressing management issues concerning environmental change within the rural-urban fringe (RUF). Crucially, the expertise and experience of academics and practitioners is combined within one research team, linking the latest theoretical and policy contributions from Spatial Planning (SP) and Ecosystem Services (ES) as they relate to environmental change.

A note from the Principal Investigator

Welcome to the first edition of this newsletter. As PI for the project it is significant to reflect upon the way this research is at the fringe in more ways than one. Uniting academics and policy experts in one team forces us all to do research in a different way which is really innovative, exciting and unnerving. Capturing the experience and ideas from the team within emerging outputs within a pragmatic but rigorous method helps us maximise policy impact. My own reflection highlights the importance of shedding artificial boundaries and looking more strategically at how things connect and work or not! The rural-urban fringe poses exciting challenges which take us all outside our usual comfort zones.



1. Rural Economy and Land Use Programme
2. Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
3. The Economic and Social Research Council
4. Natural Environment Research Council
5. Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
6. Living with Environmental Change

Introductions

Introducing the project team

Dr Alister Scott, Birmingham City University - Principal Investigator

Alister is a social scientist, geographer and chartered planner with research interests centred on the changing nature of governance, spatial planning and partnerships.

Professor Richard Coles, Birmingham City University

A Professor in Urban Landscape and Environmental Interaction with a background in landscape, community and urban forestry.

Dr Rachel Curzon, Birmingham City University

Rachel is a geographer and social scientist with research interests in environmental governance, stakeholder engagement and sustainability issues.

Dr Nick Morton, Birmingham City University

Nick is a geographer and social scientist with research interests covering urban form and structure, conservation and design, planning policy, and sustainable green space.

Dr Mark Reed, University of Aberdeen

Mark is an interdisciplinary environmental researcher, working with stakeholders to better understand, monitor and adapt to environmental change in a range of developed and developing world contexts.

Ben Stonyer, Project Officer, Birmingham City University (seconded from David Jarvis Associates)

Ben is a landscape architect with David Jarvis Associates. He has a background in urban habitat creation, green infrastructure development and community consultation.

Mark Middleton, Head of Strategic and Environmental Planning, Worcestershire County Council

Mark is a strategic planner and former Director of Policy for the West Midlands Regional Assembly. His expertise is in regional and Sub-regional planning policy; national

planning legislation and planning governance.

Karen Leach / Chris Crean, Co-ordinator, Localise West Midlands

Karen is a co-ordinator for Localise West Midlands a non-profit think tank, consultancy and campaign group promoting a localised approach to supply chains, money flow and decision-making to form a more just and sustainable economy. Chris is a part time associate of Localise West Midlands, he also chairs the WM Regional Sustainability Forum which represents the regions environmental NGO's.

David Collier, Regional Director, National Farmers Union (NFU) West Midlands

David trained as a planner and now has regional responsibility for archaeology, building conservation and urban fringe problems and farming issues on behalf of his members.

Keith Budden, Director, Birmingham Environmental Partnership

Keith has expertise in sustainable development, community regeneration and environmental policy. He has also has ten years senior management experience in strategic planning and developing partnerships.

Dr Ruth Waters, Major Project Manager, Natural England

Ruth is a natural scientist and ecologist, providing leadership to Natural England in the implementation and delivery of pilot ecosystem services projects across the uplands in England.

Introductions



Introductions continued... *Project Team*

Andrew Hearle, Regional Advocacy and Partnership Team Manager, Natural England

Andrew is an environmental planner responsible for strategic development initiatives across the West Midlands with an emphasis on whole landscape scale approaches and green infrastructure.

Bob Forster, Chair, West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum

Bob as former chair of the NFU West Midlands, brings expertise of management and rural affairs to chair the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum (WMRAF).

Claudia Carter, Forest Research

Claudia is a geographer with research interests and experience in interdisciplinary work relating to environmental governance, participatory approaches to environmental management and human-nature relationships more generally.

Miriam Kennet, CEO, Green Economics Institute

Miriam is an economist and founder of the Green Economics Institute. Miriam is active in ideas of stakeholder theory, greening supply chains, biodiversity and procurement.

David Jarvis, Managing Director, David Jarvis Associates

David is a Strategic Planner, Environmental Assessor, Mineral Planner and Landscape Architect. David's specialities include; the planning and design of large scale developments, environmental assessment and project management.

Special thanks to Professors David Boyd and Peter Larkham at BCU who are key advisors to the project.

The project is also being supported by a wider panel of professional and academic experts.

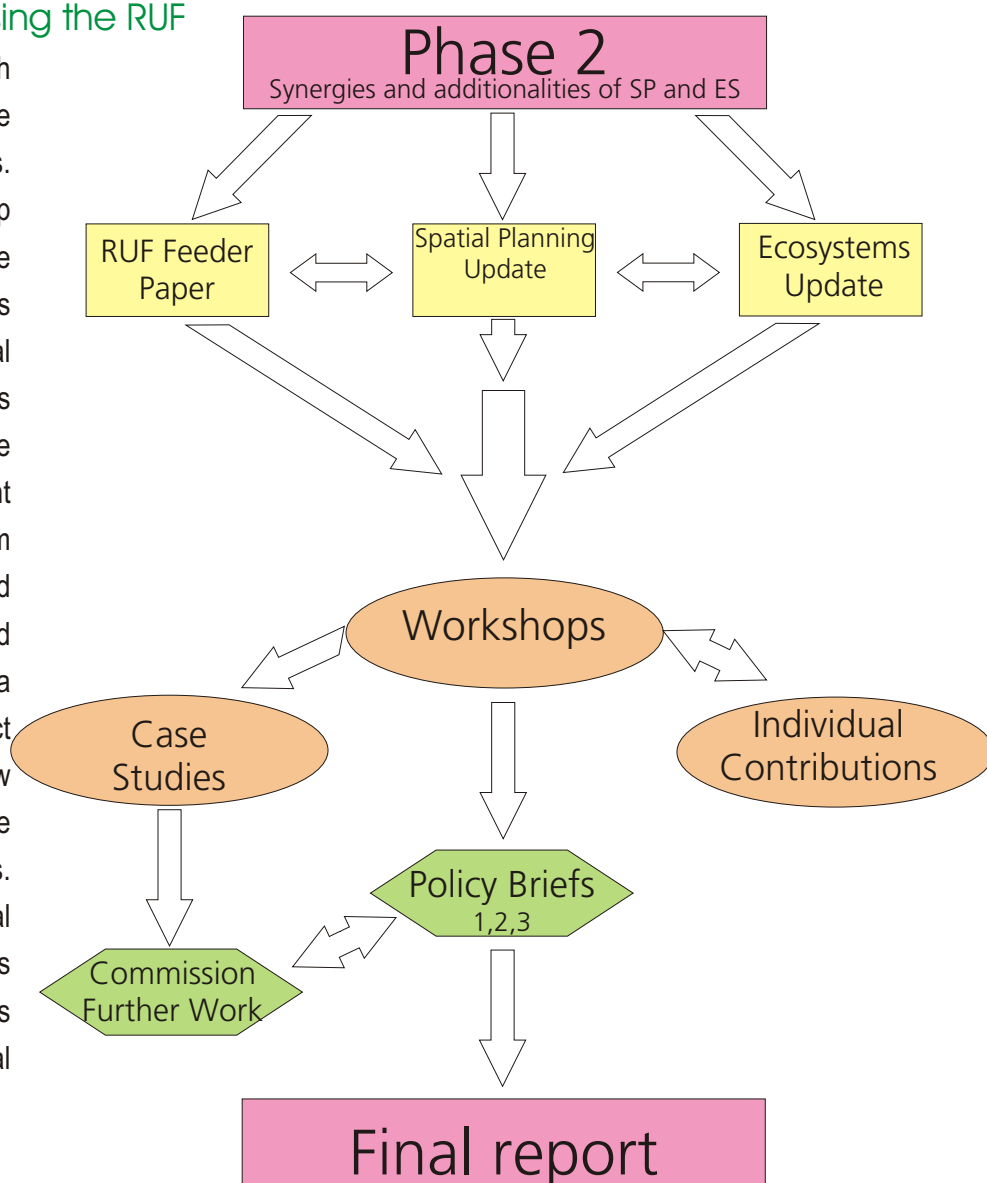
Project update



Project update - Work Phase 1

Conceptual base for analysing the RUF

The project commenced in July 2010, with Birmingham City University hosting the first meeting between research partners. A series of papers were tabled to help shape our overall approach to the management of the RUF. Key to this was the integrating of ideas from spatial planning and ecosystem services. This led to the first task where each of the project team prepared their own thought pieces on spatial planning and ecosystem services. These were then synthesised and key Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities drawn out. This shaped a summary review paper on the project allowing all team members to see how their own perspectives fitted within the wider academic and policy literatures. This helps address some of the very real problems when engaging across disciplines where different experiences and ideas need to have some conceptual bridge.



Conceptual diagram illustrating the project path between phase 2 and the final report

Project update



Project update -Work Phase 1 continued...

Key Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities drawn out drawn out of the preliminary papers

Strengths

- Both approaches convey a different way of seeing and valuing spaces.
- Both concepts stress the importance of resolving and co-ordinating different temporal and multiscalar perspectives.
- Both concepts involve integration, co-management, partnership, governance and inclusion.
- Both approaches transcend disciplines and, in particular, urban and rural boundaries.
- Both approaches stress the importance of social learning and participatory approaches.
- Both approaches recognise that different stakeholders are likely to value the fringe differently.

Weaknesses

- Both concepts are elusive and suffer from definitional fatigue hindering practical application.
- Both concepts stress integration and interdisciplinarity but remain beset by institutional myopia and sectoral approaches.
- Both concepts face an uncertain future given the current government abolition of regional planning and cuts to the natural environment.
- Both concepts have been challenged on their theoretical naivety.
- Both approaches fail to consider the role of culture and how this produces significant.

Opportunities

- A focus on learning the lessons through experiments and past research.
- A focus on edges and transitions.
- A focus on connectivity and interrelationships.
- A focus on values and their assessment informing decision making.
- A focus on the long term.
- A focus on the local and community planning.

Project update

Project update - Work Phase 2

Literature review of planning policy and academic material relevant to the RUF.

Building on the critical assessment above we identified four areas for further study which we believe are central to the RUF agenda. These will take the form of policy briefs and will draw upon seminars, workshops, individual commissioned papers and case studies of the RUF.

The areas identified for further study

1. Spatial Planning and Ecosystem services uniting theories and practice.
2. Community Environmental Governance
3. Long term perspective
4. Contested Values and Decisions

Agreed seminars include;

8th December, 2010

“Improving decision making for the sustainable management of the rural-urban fringe”

Hosted by the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum

Please contact: Alister.scott@bcu.ac.uk for further details

17th January, 2011

“Long termism; Decision making and values in the rural urban fringe” 10:00 -17:00 (including lunch)

Hosted by the Green Economics Institute, Oxford

Please contact : greeneconomicsevents@yahoo.co.uk for further details

25th January, 2011

“Working across the urban rural divide: towards new forms of environmental governance for the rural urban fringe” (particular relevance to the new approved LEP).

Hosted by the Birmingham Environmental Partnership.

Please contact: Alister.scott@bcu.ac.uk for further details.

Other workshops will be held by:

Forest Research

Localise West Midlands

Sustainable Urban Environments Urban Futures project

Please see future newsletters for further details.

What will we ultimately produce?

- Policy Briefs, research and policy papers and a toolkit for wider application across the UK. A final conference will help bring all the findings together in December 2011.
- Our approach allows academic and policy specialists to work collectively throughout the research process, crossing traditional rural/urban and natural/social science boundaries, to share knowledge and experience incorporating the latest theoretical and policy contributions from spatial planning and ecology as they relate to environmental change.
- All results will be disseminated through reports, papers, real/virtual conference(s), the project website and podcasts.

Outputs to date

Phase 1

- Twelve individual reflective papers on ecosystem services and spatial planning.

Phase 2

- Academic Paper on Bridging the spatial planning and ecosystem services divide (currently being finalised)

Phase 3

Thought piece papers to inform the Policy Briefs, these included;

- A synthesis of academic and policy literature specific to the RUF
- Spatial planning in transition: an update
- The Ecosystem approach unpacked

Seminar papers

Throughout the project findings have been disseminated through seminars and events. Papers and presentations compiled for this purpose have included;

- 'Managing the economics of global environmental change at the RUF', a paper compiled for the annual Green Economics Conference, Oxford, June 2010.
- 'What a Waste of Space: Re-imagining the Rural-Urban Fringe', a presentation given at the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) annual conference, 2nd November, 2010.

All of these papers/presentations are available on request.

Do you want to know more? Do you want to get involved?

Please contact Alister or Ben on:

Alister Scott: alister.scott@bcu.ac.uk, or
Ben Stonyer: benstonyer@davidjarvis.biz