

RURAL PROOFING OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OPTIONS – QE9: The Water Environment

1.1 Introduction

This paper presents the findings from rural proofing the suggestions for revised policy on the Quality of the Environment – The Water Environment and is a key component for influencing the authors of the draft preferred RSS Spatial Option. In pro-actively assessing the development of the Policy Options for the RSS Phase Three Revision the following has been considered:

- Whether the various options are likely to have a potential different impact for rural areas/people or uncertainty from that elsewhere, because of the particular characteristics of rural areas; and
- Where necessary, exploring what adjustments or compensations might be made to reflect rural needs and circumstances and produce the desired outcomes in rural areas or avoid/mitigate any undesirable impacts. Where appropriate rural proofing may also highlight opportunities to maximise positive impacts in rural areas

The explanatory text has been appraised against the Commission for Rural Communities Guidance [published May 2009] and is designed to be used alongside other appraisal systems including the Sustainability Appraisal process.

Please note that the checklist is designed to complement and not substitute consultation with rural communities, businesses and organisations. It is meant to be applied from the early stages of policy making although it may also be used during implementation and evaluation.

1.2 The Water Environment

The Phase Three Revision seeks to embed the requirements of the European Water Framework Directive and the requirement for all Local Planning Authorities to adhere to actions and the long term objectives of the Severn and Humber River Basin Management Plans. In examining the implications for major growth on the region, the revised policy identifies the need for new water infrastructure, better ground and surface water management, water efficiency and the enhancement of the region's Strategic river Corridors.

1.3 Analysis

In reviewing how rural issues relate to the policy suggestions on the water environment, i.e. setting out the questions to be explored by the Rural Proofing process, the suggestions have been considered. The table overleaf highlights which issues are likely to be relevant.

Table: Rural Proofing

RP Topic	Will the option/proposal.....	Policy	Comments
Availability & Provision			
RP1: Availability of services	Affect the availability of public and private services?	√	<p>Likely positive impact. Significant investment in new water infrastructure will be of particular importance to market towns, villages and smaller settlements.</p> <p>However, there is a need to be mindful of the adverse impact on the rural communities and rural economy where increased flooding of rural areas mitigates the impact on some of the region's towns and cities.</p>
RP2: Service Delivery	Be delivered through existing service outlets and how will you ensure rural residents can access services in areas where outlets are few and far between?	√	Likely positive impact. Improved infrastructure including water supply and treatment systems, ground and surface water drainage are vital to support growth/rural renaissance.
RP3: Private sector involvement	Be delivered by the private sector or through a public-private partnership? Will the smaller and scattered population in rural areas provide a sufficient market to attract the private sector?	√	<p>Likely positive impact.</p> <p>Highly likely that there will be a strong private sector involvement – through contract management.</p> <p>Likelihood of extending the employment prospects in many rural areas – private and third sector involvement.</p>

Delivery Costs			
RP4: Cost of delivery	Be more expensive to deliver in rural areas where people are more widely dispersed or economies of scale harder to achieve?	√	Preparation of water cycle studies and action plans by the Environment Agency, local authorities and others for managing the region's water requirements should allow for higher unit costs in funding formulae if applicable.
RP5: Local delivery	Rely on local institutions for delivery? Will the policy be as effective in rural areas.	√	Public and private sector delivery likely and it will be important that all are able to compete fairly and equitably in terms of funds for delivery. Clearly important to see policies embedded in county and district LDDs
Accessibility & Infrastructure			
RP6: Travel Needs	Affect travel needs or the ease and cost of travel? Will the impact be different in sparsely populated or remote rural areas, where typically journey times are longer, public transport is poor, and travel options are limited or expensive, especially for low income groups?		Not directly relevant.
RP7: Infrastructure	Rely on infrastructure (e.g. broadband ICT, main roads, utilities) for delivery? How will the policy work in rural areas, where the existing infrastructure is typically weaker (e.g. roads, electricity grid), some infrastructure doesn't exist (e.g. cable TV, mains gas) and upgrading of infrastructure may be difficult or expensive?	√	Very reliant on infrastructure. Where existing rural infrastructure is weak e.g. narrow rural roads, bridges with weight restrictions, etc. then additional thought must be given to getting materials, structures on to site and minimising any environmental impacts.

RP8: Administrative Areas	Delivery of the policy be challenging at the edges of administrative areas? Many rural people find it easier to cross an administrative boundary to access facilities.	√	Embedded within the River basin Management Plans. Further work is needed in terms of identifying inter-regional or international (Wales) relationships/synergies/policy delivery. Where possible, encourage “postcode” blindness and reciprocal sharing of service provision across administrative borders where this makes sense.
RP9: New buildings or development sites	Depend on new buildings or development sites? Where will these be located in rural areas, given that there are few brownfield sites and fewer locations where housing or other development will be acceptable?	√	Create flexibility for development to be located in rural areas where it is most appropriate and most needed. Clearly important to see policies embedded in county and district LDDs and sites/areas defined ensuring any development will contribute to local character and distinctiveness.
Communications			
RP10: Communication	Rely on communicating information to individuals and communities? How will they access information in rural areas, where there are fewer (formal) places to obtain advice and information?	√	A clear communications policy encouraging the support from rural communities is essential. Failure to properly manage the communications process will have implications for securing buy-in for planning proposals and the opportunity of promoting community engagement in rural areas
Economies			
RP11: Impact on rural businesses	Impact on rural businesses, including the self-employed? Will it have a different effect on those sectors which are typically more significant in rural areas - farming and construction? Will the higher proportion of self-employed people in rural areas be affected by the policy	√	Positive effect – particularly on smaller businesses and those that typically employ a greater proportion of the workforce in rural areas. Where possible the policies should avoid imposing additional regulatory or other burdens that will disproportionately affect small firms and micro-businesses

<p>RP12: Impact on land-based industries</p>	<p>Have a particular impact on land-based industries and therefore on rural economies and environments? How will the policy affect the agricultural sector and the mining, extraction and water industries, which have a particular importance in many rural areas? Will there be a knock-on effect on the environment (given that 70% of the land is farmed)? Conversely, if the policy affects the environment, what are the implications for businesses based on natural resources such as tourism, leisure, renewable energy and food production?</p>	<p>√</p>	<p>Positive Impact – particularly for businesses which rely on a high quality environment in rural areas, e.g. farming, forestry, tourism, leisure, renewable energy and food production.</p> <p>Lots of opportunities to identify “win-win” solutions which will deliver economic, biodiversity, green infrastructure and environmental benefits. Maximise the use of incentives for environmentally friendly practices allowing for and encouraging a diverse range of rural enterprises</p>
<p>RP13: Impact upon those on low income</p>	<p>Affect those on low wages or in part-time or seasonal employment? For those who work in rural areas, wages tend to be lower on average and a higher proportion of the workforce is engaged in part-time or seasonal employment. Will your policy implementation affect wage levels or people’s access to quality employment? Will it affect the type of businesses that tend to pay low wages or offer seasonal/part-time work (e.g. agriculture, tourism)?</p>	<p>√</p>	<p>Likely positive impact.</p> <p>Additional employment opportunities arising from installing/replacing infrastructure could increase or extend the availability of jobs. Consider measures to improve the choice of work (e.g. increasing skills, improving local childcare, improving transport to work).</p>
<p>Disadvantage</p>			
<p>RP14: Disadvantaged Groups</p>	<p>To be targeted at the disadvantaged? How will it target disadvantage in rural areas, which is not usually concentrated in neighbourhoods? Do the indicators to be used for identifying need measure deprivation issues that are particular rural features (e.g. access to services, access to job opportunities, low earnings and housing affordability)</p>	<p>√</p>	<p>Not directly relevant but improved landscapes and employment opportunities may lead to a better quality of life for disadvantaged individuals and rural communities.</p>