



Crafts in the
English
Countryside:
Towards a
Future

Creative Rural Communities

Proposal for a Rural
Cultural Strategy



Above: Glastonbury Festival
Right: Olympic Fields - Farming as Art
proposal for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad



Report Part 1: Rural Cultural Forum

Message from the Chairman

Executive Summary



Michael Hart - Chairman, Rural Cultural Forum

The Creative Rural Communities report Part 1 is the outcome of over four years research and consultancy work led by the Rural Cultural Forum and the LITTORAL Arts Trust, which began with the Rural Cultural Summit at Tate Britain in May 2005.

This is not the definitive report on the potential of rural community creativity and the creative rural economy, or about the future role of professional arts in support of Government initiatives for rural regeneration and environmental sustainability in the countryside. This has yet to come. Part 2 of the Creative Rural Communities report, which we hope would be available in 2011, will attempt to address these ideas and other proposals in more detail. Taken together, Parts 1 and part 2 aim to present a much fuller picture of the creative potential of rural and farming communities, including the significant contribution already being made to the national economy by the creative rural sector. This includes the many professional artists, crafts people, media experts, and designers now also living and working in rural areas. Part 1 further outlines some basic arguments for a national rural cultural strategy, that would help to coordinate and sustain these initiatives into the future. It also proposes that a comprehensive national study or survey be made to produce some concrete evidence of some of the quantifiable economic, social, health, educational and environmental sustainability benefits that might also accrue from these initiatives - for both urban and rural communities.

The main purpose of the Part 1 Report is to stimulate and inform wider public debate around the proposal for a national rural cultural strategy. In this context it presents in basic outline what some elements of a possible future rural cultural strategy might look like, and how they might be implemented in practical terms. Its second function, is to provide the basis for further discussions between the RCF and the lead statutory agencies (DCMS, DEFRA, Arts Council England and the Commission for Rural Communities, etc.) about the feasibility of such a rural cultural strategy, and to enable other interested stakeholders and support organizations (e.g. rural community, professional arts, heritage, design, farming, tourism, academic, health, scientific, environmental) to also participate and have an input in these discussions.

Recent Government and arts sector reports (Culture at the Heart of Regeneration (DCMS, 2004), and the Creative Britain Report (DCMS, 2008) further underline some of the tangible economic, social and environmental benefits made available to urban communities, urban businesses and the urban creative industries (CI), via strategic culture-led regeneration and funding initiatives. Examples include; the Coalfields Regeneration programmes, SeaChange - the Seaside Towns regeneration programmes, and the Liverpool 08 Capital of Culture/Liverpool Biennale initiatives. However, despite all the rhetoric about providing wider regional benefits and ensuring access for all communities and social inclusivity, some of these strategic culture-led national regeneration initiatives, such as the Urban Cultural Programme (2004 - 2006), the Liverpool European City of Culture 08 and, recently, the launch of the UK City of Culture bidding rounds, seem to offer very little support for rural communities to participate. In fact, rural communities would appear not to have benefited in any significant way from previous Government sponsored culture-led regeneration initiatives. This situation would need to change and this therefore is now one of the main aims of the RCF's 'Cultural Entitlement' campaign.

Part of our argument for equity in terms of future cultural funding for rural communities and rural regeneration, also rests on the already significant contribution that rural and farming communities are currently making to the national creative economy. Some estimates put this figure at around £500 million p.a., and it is further argued that there is still enormous untapped creative potential and entrepreneurial/cultural capacity available within the rural sector to help improve upon this total even further. However further detailed study would need to be undertaken in order to substantiate such claims. This particular campaign aim is further expained under the section titled; Cultural Efficacy - 'paying our way and getting things done'. In addition to outlining the positive economic contribution and benefits that a formal rural cultural strategy might bring to the national economy, the RCF is also committed to deploying all its creative and cultural resources in support of the Government's initiatives aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and bio-diversity in the countryside. This forms part of our third campaign strategy strand; promoting 'Cultural Responsibility'

2010 is already proving to be an important watershed for the nation, and in terms of the radical new political, economic and environmental outcomes. The Rural Cultural Forum, and its partners in the rural community and professional arts, therefore stand ready and willing to do their full part in tackling these important new economic and environmental challenges now confronting our nation.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Arts Council England for their support which enabled the Rural Cultural Strategy project to go forward. We would also like to thank Sir Donald Curry and Dr Stuart Burgess, the Rural Advocate, for their invaluable advice and ongoing support. Also DCMS, the Commission for Rural Communities and DEFRA for their good advice and support.

Michael Hart (RCF Chairman)
01/07/10



Jennie Hayes © Women in Farming, Aune Head Arts

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Introduction

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Rare Breed - Hill farmers and upland rural communities in Cumbria. Like urban communities, farming and rural communities are also culturally, economically and demographically very diverse. Photo. Rob Fraser

The Purpose of the Report

The main purpose of the report is to provide a background discussion document, with some illustrated project examples, that could inform and stimulate wider public debate about a proposed rural cultural strategy. In support of this the report outlines something of the background to the establishment of the Rural Cultural Forum, what its current aims and objectives are, and then concludes with a rationale and some practical examples in support of its campaign for a coordinated national cultural strategy for farming and rural communities in England.

What are the RCF's main campaign aims?

In basic terms the campaign aims of the RCF are: (i) promoting cultural entitlement and equity in arts funding and investment for rural and farming communities; (ii) identifying new cultural investment and arts funding resources to support specific rural regeneration, farm diversification, rural environmental sustainability and rural community development initiatives; encourage a new role for the professional arts, design and media sectors (urban and rural) in support of economic regeneration, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability initiatives in rural areas; and to work with the lead statutory agencies (DCMS, Arts Council England, Commission for Rural Communities, and DEFRA, and others) to promote the creative rural economy, rural arts and culture, and to also try to help achieve better integration of the arts and culture within future Government policy agendas for rural development, agriculture reform, rural tourism and heritage, and environmental sustainability initiatives the countryside.

Who is the report for and how can other individuals and organisations respond?

The report (Part 1) is designed to stimulate wider public debate about the proposed rural cultural strategy and, as such, the Rural Cultural Forum would welcome further comments, criticisms and feedback from all sectors of the community, including any interested individuals. Again, we wish to stress, that this is not the definitive report about the future creative, artistic and cultural needs and potential of farming and rural communities. We hope that this will come later in the form of a Part 2 Report. In this context, it is planned to hold one or two rural cultural strategy feed-back forums and seminars over the next six months, to allow other interested stakeholders and individuals to comment and have an input. Information about these will be mailed out upon request, and will also be posted on the RCF website: <www.ruralculture.org.uk>

The Rural Cultural Forum committee

The Forum (RCF) was established in 2005 as a coalition of grassroots rural and farming community support organisations, including professionals from the (urban and rural) arts, design and rural media sectors, interested in promoting rural community creativity and rural arts and culture in the UK. The members of the Executive committee are listed under:



(L-R) Michael Hart, Chairman of The Small and Family Farmers Alliance; Alastair Davy, Chairman of The Hill-Farming Initiative; Pat Holtom, Trustee ACRE, Action with Communities in Rural England; Nic Millington, Director The Rural Media Company, Hereford; Ian Hunter, Director of the Littoral Arts Trust.

About The Rural Cultural Forum

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John Constable's 'The Hay Wain' 1821 A world-class example of British art; inspired at a time of radical change in rural England

"The countryside has always been an important influence in British Art. Rural Communities deserve to have a cultural strategy that would enable them to play a greater role in the nation's cultural life" (Stephen Deuchar, Tate Britain, 2005)

Background

The Rural Cultural Strategy came into being partly as a response to the rural recovery initiatives following the devastating Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001. Following on from this, the Curry Report (2002) and the Rural Strategy report (DEFRA 2004), coupled with the growing impact of CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reform, pointed up the need for a radical rethink about the future of agriculture and rural community development policy in Britain from an arts and cultural perspective. In recognition of the radical nature of the changes, and seeking to widen the remit of the arts in the context of various rural regeneration and rural social inclusion initiatives then coming on stream, Arts Council England commissioned the LITTORAL Trust in 2002 to undertake a detailed scoping study into the future role of the arts in rural areas.

A Cultural focus on Rural Development Policy - post CAP

The study had three main aims: Firstly, to examine a new role for the arts in the context of the new policy initiatives proposed by the then Government for economic regeneration, social inclusion and environmental sustainability in rural areas. Secondly, to explore the possibility of introducing a range of new artistic practices, critical insights, and curatorial strategies that might be better suited to the new intellectual challenges and policy contexts then emerging in relation to the future of the countryside and rural communities. And, thirdly, to try and configure a national response or strategic framework through which to coordinate and take this work forward.



Stephen Deuchar, Director of Tate Britain meets Dr Stuart Burgess, the Government Rural Advocate, at the Rural Cultural Summit, Tate Britain, May 2005

Recommendations; Arts Council England - 'Investing in Creative Rural Communities' report (2004)

The 'Investing in Creative Rural Communities: the New Rural Arts' report was published in 2004, and included a series of practical recommendations. These were later ratified at the first national Rural Cultural Summit which took place at Tate Britain in London, in May 2005. These included:

1. Rural Cultural Strategy.

Development of a nationally coordinated rural cultural strategy and investment initiative capable of supporting the Government's main agendas for rural recovery, farm diversification, sustainable food production, and environmental initiatives in the countryside, and as further defined in the Rural Strategy, (DEFRA, 2004), and the national Creative Economy 'Culture at the Heart of Regeneration', DCMS, 2004).

2. Rural Cultural Forum. Establishment of a Rural Cultural Forum to function as a cultural advocacy, networking and arts development agency for rural communities and artists. To also function as a grassroots campaign and lobbying agency promoting a greater degree of cultural equity and arts funding investment for rural communities. The Forum also advocated for a greater input for rural communities input into key areas of decision making relating to future arts and cultural policy and funding for rural areas.

3. Arts and Rural Regeneration. Provision of a coordinated national rural arts investment, development and training programme to encourage professional artists, designers, media, craftworkers and architects to become more involved in addressing some of the key economic, social, and environmental issues affecting rural communities, and to also take advantage of the new intellectual challenges and creative employment opportunities now also opening up for them in the rural sector.

“The Rural Cultural Forum has been campaigning for almost ten years for cultural entitlement, and fairer access to arts and cultural funding and resources for rural communities and artists. The time has now come for some positive action.”

RCF Committee, May 2010



RCF Committee meets with Arts Council England Policy Director Pauline Tambling and team, ACE HQ, Great Peter Street, May 2000

The Work of the Rural Cultural Forum

Advocacy and conferences:

The RCF also undertakes a range of cultural advocacy work on behalf of rural communities, and with the statutory agencies, DCMS, DEFRA, Arts Council England and (formerly) the Commission for Rural Communities. Its main work has been in promoting the Rural Cultural Strategy and also in making the case for new arts and cultural funding and resources for rural communities, rural artists and for rural regeneration. The RCF also organises conferences and exhibitions and new urban/ rural partnerships. These include the New Rural Design and Architecture conference at the DEFRA/CSL centre in York in June 2005, and the first international Creative Rural Economy conference at Lancaster University in September 2006.

New rural arts – supporting professional arts development and research

The RCF is interested in working with professional urban and rural artists in all aspects of its work. It also promotes the New Rural Arts and Art and Agriculture as important emerging new genres of critical art practice, which engage both urban and rural issues and communities. It encourages and supports other contemporary art practitioners (crafts, designers, architects, writers, new media and performing arts, etc.) interested in developing innovative projects in support of rural community development, the creative rural economy, rural tourism, environmental sustainability, farm diversification, and social inclusion initiatives in the countryside. It is also interested in developing a professional data-base of new rural arts, design and crafts projects developing nationally and internationally, for use by artists, art schools, art councils and rural communities.

Creative rural communities - networking and support work

The RCF further aims to provide a cultural information, advisory, networking, and support service for rural communities everywhere. It is interested in documenting and sharing examples of best practice from successful rural community-led creative rural economy, arts and rural tourism, craft marketing, and festival projects. The RCF helps rural community groups to design arts and cultural projects that address a range of rural community, farm diversification and countryside regeneration objectives and issues. It seeks to encourage and enable rural communities and farmers to develop their own distinctly rural arts projects and cultural events and, where possible, also help them write successful arts funding grant applications in support of these, and in accessing existing arts and cultural funding sources. It also aims to celebrate, and promote traditional countryside arts and crafts and rural cultural traditions in all their rich local vernacular and regional contexts.

European and International creative rural communities:

Following the Creative Rural Economy conference at Lancaster, the RCF helped to initiate a European Rural Cultural Conference Network, the follow-up conference to which was hosted by the Dutch Agriculture Ministry at the Kasteel Groeneveld Conference Centre in November 2008. In November 2009 the RCF also helped to initiate and participated in ACRE – the first Australian Creative Rural Economy conference held at the Swan Hill Art Centre, Northern Victoria. The RCF is also establishing a partnership link with the Creative Rural Economy Initiative in Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada. The Rural Cultural Strategy launch event held recently at Parliament in February 2010, also marked the outcome of over ten years of research, lobbying and advocacy work for a national rural cultural strategy.

Our Campaign Aims

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“Using all of Britain’s creative talents... we have a responsibility to give everybody the opportunity to unlock their creative talents.”

‘Creative Britain’ Report (DCMS, 2008)



Michael Eavis, dairy farmer and founder of the world famous Glastonbury Festival

Rural Cultural Forum Campaign Aims

The Rural Cultural Forum currently has three main campaign aims. The first two of which focus on the need to provide rural communities with full cultural entitlement and fairer access to existing strategic arts and cultural regeneration funding, including the introduction of a coherent rural cultural strategy through which to develop and implement these objectives. The third strand, which remains a longer term objective, is the proposal for a national cultural strategy for environmental and economic sustainability.

‘If rural communities are to unlock all their creative talents and achieve their full cultural potential, and continue to contribute to the national creative economy, then they feel that they are entitled to have fairer access to the available strategic national arts and cultural funding and related regeneration initiatives’.

Michael Hart, Chair Rural Cultural Forum

Although mainly committed to supporting the artistic and cultural needs of rural and farming communities and rural artists, the RCF believes that both urban and rural communities should also benefit equally from its campaigns and proposed arts development work. The proposed rural cultural strategy therefore includes provision for a longer term; i.e. looking ‘Beyond the Rural’ strategy, and in particular to the need for urban and rural communities to now work actively together to structure a new overarching cultural policy discourse aimed at promoting economic and environmental sustainability.

Main Campaign Aims

Cultural Entitlement: promoting equal access and equity for rural communities and artists in relation to available national arts and cultural strategic funding and lottery arts funded investment initiatives;

Cultural Efficacy: delivering a strategic framework to support development of the creative rural economy, and arts and rural regeneration and social inclusion initiatives in the countryside;

Cultural Responsibility: contributing to a new cultural policy discourse and strategy aimed at supporting future national economic and environmental sustainability goals.

Cultural Entitlement



Culture Minister Ed Vaizey. Affirms his support for the Rural Cultural Strategy. 10/02/2010 (photo Nic Millington)

"When we are elected.. we will support a rural cultural strategy" The Rt. Hon., Ed Vazey, Culture Minister DCMS

Cultural Entitlement for Rural Communities

Promoting cultural entitlement and equity for rural communities

A key aim of the Rural Cultural Forum has been in securing full cultural entitlement and fair access to existing arts and cultural strategic funding initiatives for rural communities, creative farmers and artists. Cultural entitlement for rural communities would enable them to deploy their full range of creative resources, entrepreneurial skills, and cultural capital in support of the national programme for economic recovery, sustainable communities and environmental sustainability. Rural communities also want to have a say in setting priorities for future arts and cultural funding policy targets for rural areas, and in encouraging the arts, media and cultural sectors to do more to deliver key elements of the Government's creative economy (DCMS), healthy communities (CRC) and environmental sustainability (DEFRA) targets in rural and urban areas

Achieving stronger, sustainable rural communities

Cultural entitlement would also help strengthen and sustain rural communities by encouraging them to take on greater responsibility for their future economic development, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. It would further help them to promote and enhance their spirit of independence, individual and collective self-esteem, and creativity and entrepreneurial capacities, and also to develop new creative ways of tackling problems associated with rural isolation, lack of health care provision, poor transport services, lack of affordable housing, and economic and social exclusion in rural areas.

Addressing the urban bias in cultural funding policy

Cultural equity for rural communities basically means ensuring fairer access to available mainstream arts and cultural funding and related strategic national culture-led regeneration initiatives. It would appear, that the majority of national arts and cultural funding initiatives over the past ten years have ignored and further marginalised rural communities. During the post-FMD recovery period, for example, proposals for rural community arts and culture-led regeneration projects failed to benefit in anyway from Government sponsored cultural regeneration schemes. Two examples will suffice (there are many others!); the ACE/Millennium Commissions sponsored £19.5 million Urban Cultural Fund programme, and, more recently, the UK City of Culture Initiative. Both of which, in our view, have actively discriminated against rural communities by rejecting their preliminary applications out of hand, and/or by ignoring their appeals for fairness in terms of accessing these particular strategic culture-led regeneration funds.



The Livestock Foundation 2005 - an imaginative culture-led rural regeneration initiative which failed partly through lack of strategic arts funding

Why the need for a strategic rural cultural investment programme?

Despite these problems and setbacks rural communities remain very positive and are confident that their creative potential, entrepreneurial skills and cultural capital will continue to make an ongoing and vital contribution to the nation's cultural life and creative economy. The rural contribution to the UK creative economy alone is currently estimated at around £500 million p.a., and growing. Rural leaders also acknowledge that they have benefited in the past from some Arts Council, Heritage Lottery, RDA and local authority funding for arts and cultural programmes, including vital cultural support from various DEFRA/LEADER+ and RDPE funding initiatives. However, this support has in the main been sporadic, limited in scope and unevenly dispersed, and continues to suffer from a lack of strategic focus and framework for sustainability. This therefore makes it very difficult to assess the full economic, cultural and social benefits of the contribution being made by the professional arts, media and cultural sectors in rural areas and, equally important, achieving a credible means of measuring and enhancing the already significant contribution being made by the rural sector to the expanding national creative economy.

Cultural Efficacy- paying your way; making it happen

Making the economic arguments

In this context the report sets out to make three economic arguments in support of a rural cultural strategy. Firstly, by citing practical examples of the economic potential of creative farmers; e.g. Glastonbury Festival the world's most successful large scale, outdoor musical event, again entirely managed and promoted by a Somerset dairy farmer -Michael Eavis and his daughter. Secondly, by pointing out the significance of the as yet considerable untapped creative potential and cultural capital available in rural communities everywhere. And, thirdly, by documenting the already significant contribution to the national creative economy being made by numerous professional artists, crafts workers, media, musicians and designers, etc., now based permanently in rural areas.



Photograph - Tessa Bunney

Estimated rural sector contribution of £500 million p.a. to the national creative economy

Recent studies and reports about rural innovation, cultural capital and creativity (Arts Council England 2004, RCF Creative Rural Economy report, 2006, NESTA Rural Innovation report - 2007, etc.) would seem to indicate that creative rural communities and professional artists and designers in rural England are already making a significant contribution to the nation's creative economy. This contribution is conservatively estimated to be around £500 million p.a., comparable in relative terms to that generated to the national economy by the urban creative industries and the urban arts and cultural sector. But, again, it needs to be underlined that this contribution has been achieved without any of the strategic art and cultural investment or infrastructure provided by the previous Government for urban communities, urban creatives and in support of urban regeneration.

Citing precedents - strategic funding for urban arts and culture-led regeneration initiatives

It is now widely accepted that the extraordinary growth of the urban creative industries, urban community sustainability, and the success of culture-led urban regeneration programmes all benefited significantly from the pump-priming effect of Government-led strategic cultural investment and infrastructure programmes. These included the Urban Cultural Programme (£19.5 million over 2004-2006, ACE/Millennium Commission), the Coalfields Regeneration community, arts and cultural programmes, (awarded grants of £190 million over ten years), the European (Liverpool 08) Capital City of Culture (at an estimated turn over of £800 million from a public investment of £105 million), the SeaChange seaside towns cultural regeneration programmes (£45 million over three years, 2008 – 2011, DCMS/CABE) and, recently, the UK City of Culture investment programme (with an estimated budget investment of £10 million per city)

Countering the urban bias in strategic cultural investment programmes

By way of contrast, the arts and culture-led rural regeneration programmes proposed by the RCF (during 2005 – 2009) on behalf of rural and farming communities, then still struggling to recover after the devastating effects of FMD, received almost nothing. More recently, proposals for rural community-led arts and cultural regeneration initiatives have also failed to attract any support in the initial bidding rounds for the current UK City of Culture Initiative (DCMS). Not to mention the several hundreds of millions of pounds from Arts Lottery, Arts Council England, and other public/private funding sources funding which have gone to fund a plethora of 'iconic' urban museums and art galleries; such as Tate Modern extension, Walsall Art Gallery, BALTIC art centre, URBIS - urban Cultural Center Manchester, the Turner Contemporary Margate, The PUBLIC Wolverhampton, including the growing number of urban-based International Art Biennales; e.g. Liverpool Biennale, Folkestone Triennale, and London Biennale.

Re-thinking the role of rural culture in wider strategic policy contexts

Following consultation with officials at DCMS, DEFRA, ACE and the Commission for Rural Communities the aims of the Rural Cultural Strategy were refocused to take account of key Government economic recovery and environmental sustainability policy agendas. Restated, the Rural Cultural Strategy is committed to supporting key Government programmes aimed at: developing strong, healthy and sustainable rural communities (DEFRA/CRC), growing the national Creative Economy (DCMS), creating new audiences and promoting wider access to great (rural) art for all (Arts Council England), and also in achieving full economic and environmental sustainability for both urban and rural communities (DEFRA).

Restating the strategic aims and objectives of the rural cultural strategy:

- to promote cultural equity for rural communities, and ensure fairer provision of future arts funding and cultural investment for regeneration and environmental sustainability programmes in rural areas.
- to encourage a wider role for the professional arts, media and design sector (urban and rural) in support of rural economic regeneration, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability initiatives in the countryside.
- to develop a five year pilot cultural investment strategy for rural communities and artists that will sustain the social and economic benefits of arts and culture-led regeneration programmes in rural areas.
- to work with DCMS, DEFRA, Arts Council England to ensure that future arts and culture-led rural regeneration initiatives address key Government policies promoting the creative economy (DCMS); access to great art for everyone (ACE); sustainable rural communities and economic and environmental sustainability (DEFRA).
- to double the creative rural sector's contribution to the national creative economy to £1 billion, over the next ten years.

Sustainable Cultures - thinking beyond the rural

Promoting sustainable urban and rural communities and economies

The third main aim of the RCF's campaign programme is in promoting a greater sense of cultural responsibility. From its inception the RCF has wanted to demonstrate that, although it was partly about supporting rural cultures and farmer creativity, it also had a responsibility to look beyond the rural, and to try and find creative ways of tackling wider environmental issues and urban social problems. In proposing 'Sustainable Cultures' as a possible third campaign strand, the RCF acknowledges that there is a compelling social need for urban and rural communities to now work together to support the Government and world agenda for environmental sustainability and economic recovery. This is one of the key cultural challenges facing society today, which also transcends outmoded notions of urban versus rural agendas.

Cultural responsibility – thinking beyond the rural

For the Sustainable Cultures initiative to be successful, we think it is essential to establish a coalition of rural and urban stake-holders and representatives from the urban professional arts, media, design and cultural sectors, willing to collaborate on developing a national cultural strategy for environmental sustainability. The proposal may be met with scepticism in some quarters, but such cross-sectoral coalitions for environmental sustainability are winning increasing public support. Although working on the fringes of Government policy agendas agencies, it is sometimes possible for a relatively small NGO or organisation like the Rural Cultural Forum, to anticipate interesting new areas of overlap or congruity between different Government initiatives and policy arenas and, albeit, in a modest way suggest novel connections and other creative linkages.

In this context the RCF has no claim to expertise on rural development, environmental or agricultural policy or, for that matter, on arts and cultural policy. These are the responsibilities respectively of DEFRA, CRC, DCMS and the Arts Council. But, again, functioning as a catalytic agency, the RCF can also make suggestions and, if public support is so stimulated, put proposals forward to the Government Ministers and statutory agencies responsible for further consideration.

Thinking the unthinkable; a creative challenge and opportunity?

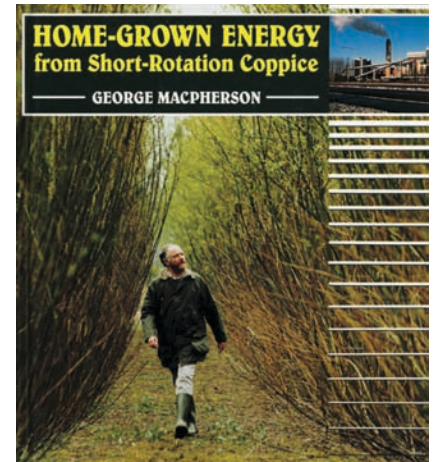
In thinking 'beyond the rural', it seems quite reasonable to suggest that the ecological and economic disruption predicted in the wake of accelerated climate change and the economic downturn, requires that all Governments and their peoples should now begin to act together and to think up new creative and inventive ways of addressing some of these radical changes and problems. This also means having to re-think conventional policy agendas, and the institutions and mechanisms entrusted with their delivery, which is of course a matter as much for exponents of hearts and culture as well as for scientists, bureaucrats, civil servants or economists.

Care Farming is worth £149m to UK Rural Economy

Another such example of rural cultural responsibility in action is the National Care Farming Initiative UK (NCFI), based at Harper Adams University College, Shropshire. In addition to the vital social, health and education work that care farmers are now providing nationally, the 'Care Farmer Practitioner Steering Group' also estimates that a single care farm operation could generate an average revenue of £52,517 p.a.

In this context the RCF is advocating two possible future policy research arenas:

- 1 **Seeking the support and collaboration of DCMS and DEFRA in developing a joint national cultural strategy for environmental sustainability and economic recovery.**
- 2 **A Cultural Strategy for DEFRA? Proposal to undertake a research study aimed at opening some of DEFRA's main programmes and initiatives to new cultural perspectives and creative insights.**



Murray Carter - a Yorkshire farmer and pioneer of willow bio-mass energy initiatives



New energy landscapes are transforming public understanding of rural environments and agricultural priorities



Farmers are pioneering new educational and healthcare projects on their farms; Care Farmer Practitioner Steering Group

Cultural Responsibility



“The prime minister has said he wants the new coalition administration to be ‘the greenest government ever’. David Cameron was speaking to civil servants at the Department of Energy and Climate Change on his tour around Whitehall to introduce the new government”

Caroline Spelman - Right Hon, Secretary of State, DEFRA

Sustainable Cultures - New urban rural partnership for environmental sustainability

A second part of the rural Cultural Forum's sustainable cultures initiative is in promoting the idea of a new cultural strategy (Urban and rural) for environmental sustainability.

1 DCMS and DEFRA support for introduction of a cultural strategy for environmental sustainability?

DCMS and DEFRA are well positioned to respond to support proposals for a Cultural Strategy for Environmental and Economic Sustainability. Furthermore, if it can be demonstrated that there is substantial public, community, professional and political support for such an initiative, it is hoped that the two agencies, at Ministerial or Departments level might be willing to take the proposal forward, even to a feasibility study stage?

This need not be a major undertaking, and could possibly be progressed as an inter-departmental partnership and dialogue involving leading stakeholders and statutory agencies (Arts Council, DECC, Environment Agency, Design Council, Natural England, NESTA, RIBA). Some community, NGOs and arts organisations are already working to develop Sustainable Cultures partnerships, and the features of a practical delivery mechanism are already taking shape. The Arts Council and the RSA for example recently concluded an Art and Ecology initiative in which artists and scientists are working together to come up with creative and practical solutions to global warming. The concept of a Rural Cultural Strategy was designed to show how a community-led cultural strategy for environmental and economic sustainability could work in practice. What would help is some strategic leadership and guidance from our leading statutory agencies, and that could possibly be started with the introduction of an inter-departmental or cross-sector debate on the proposal.

2 A Cultural Role for DEFRA?

Following on from this is the suggestion that DEFRA could also consider reviewing some of its core Environment, Food and Rural Affairs programmes from a cultural perspective. This could include exploration of creative insights and other ways of promoting public understanding and responses to issues about protecting bio-diversity, tackling climate change, changing public attitudes to waste and recycling, supporting sustainable rural communities, growing the creative rural economy, supporting healthy eating and safe food initiatives, and in support of veterinary programmes and animal welfare standards. The Forestry Authority, Natural England, the National Parks and The Environment Agency have all proved to be imaginative patrons of the arts, and have variously employed a range of innovative arts and cultural projects in support of some of their public engagement and related statutory objectives. In this context the proposed cultural role for DEFRA may not be such a far-fetched idea as it might seem at first.

Also, DEFRA has, both directly and indirectly, been an important initiator and funder of innovative arts, media and cultural programmes relating to some of its core rural development programmes and environmental sustainability initiatives. Although the Department might claim rather modestly that it had merely managed the LEADER+ programme i.e. “at arms length” and on behalf of the EAGGF, the significant impact (social, environmental and economic) of the extensive rural arts and cultural projects funded via DEFRA and LEADER+, in this country, exceeded by far the total of arts programmes funded by the Arts Council and DCMS in rural areas over the past ten years. And, as was demonstrated at the 2006 Lancaster University Creative Rural Economy conference, the ‘kick-start’ effect that this DEFRA/LEADER+ funding had on the development of the Creative Rural Economy has been quite extraordinary. LEADER+ in some respects has functioned as a de facto cultural funding agency for rural and farming communities, yet no comprehensive study has yet been made of the millions of pounds of arts and cultural investment provided to rural areas via DEFRA and EAGGF between 2001 – 2007.

A more recent example of DEFRA initiated cultural projects came through the Climate Change Fund programme (now part of DECC), which began in 2006 with £4.6 million, designed ‘.. to raise awareness at regional and local level of the urgent need to tackle climate change..’ A number of leading artist groups and design-based organisations (Harrison Studios/MMU, URBED, Manchester) bid successfully for funding, and produced exhibitions and public art projects about climate change, some of which are still touring public galleries and museums throughout the country.





The Public Farm Project PS1, Brooklyn 2008. The Museum of Modern Art, New York and PS1 coordinates a major exhibition about food and farming. Curators, artists, farmer and urban activists find a common purpose in promoting food security, urban agriculture and environmental sustainability

Introduction

This section of the report explains in more detail what some of the practical project delivery elements of a cultural strategy might look like, or consist of, and how they might also be implemented in practice. Subsections 4.1 - 4.7 further details some of the possible arts project developmental methodologies that one could expect to see in a conventional cultural investment strategy. These are also modelled partly on the successful examples of the Urban Cultural Programme (2004 - 2006), and DCMS's development priorities as outlined recently for the UK City of Culture investment programme.

In this context the Rural Cultural Strategy project development strands (under) constitute the heart of the RCF's 'Cultural Efficacy', or practical projects delivery strategy. Although by no means the only project development strands under consideration, they do represent in the main some of the core elements which could become the RCF's main arts development work over the next 3 -5 years. These project development strands (See 1- 7 under) were arrived at through extensive research and consultancy work over the past four years, and further refined through a series of public conferences and seminars, including the Rural Cultural Summit held at Tate Britain in May 2005, and the Creative Rural Economy conference also held at Lancaster University in September 2006.

They were also included in a range of discussion papers produced by the RCF committee between 2004 and 2009 and distributed to lead stakeholders and partners in the professional arts, rural community and farming sectors, including officials at DCMS, DEFRA, CRC, and the Arts Council (see 'A Cultural Strategy for Rural England', 2008), for further comment and analysis.

The projects development strands listed under are not intended to be prescriptive, nor does the RCF committee imagine that, even if funding were to become available, all of them could be introduced at the same time. This would not be practical or advisable. However they are intended as a starting for further discussions about what might constitute the basis for a practical five-year (minimum period) rural cultural investment programme.

Proposed project development strands:

- 1. National Rural Cultural Centre and Museum of Contemporary Art and the Countryside**
- 2. International Rural Biennale and Sustainable Urban/Rural Cultures initiative**
- 3. Creative Rural Economy and Rural Digital Media investment programme**
- 4. A New Rural Aesthetic – National Rural Design, Craft and Architecture initiative**
- 5. Grains of Truth – national rural photography and new media documentary programme**
- 6. Rural Diversities – new urban rural cultural partnerships and supporting marginal rural communities**
- 7. Contemporary rural crafts - Fashion and Farming**

“...if urban communities can benefit from over £1 billion of arts lottery investment over the past ten years, then why shouldn’t rural communities benefit in some way too”

Rural RCF committee, June 2010

Learning from urban cultural-led regeneration initiatives, the £14.9 million MIMA Contemporary Art Museum project designed to lead Middlesborough’s economic regeneration



Learning from urban community cultural regeneration initiatives

In advocating for a rural cultural strategy the RCF has been inspired partly by the achievements of various urban communities who, in partnership with other urban professional arts, media and cultural sector agencies, were successful in drawing down significant arts and cultural funding in support of social, economic and environmental regeneration in their home areas and constituencies. The success of these strategic urban cultural investment programmes has been well documented and evaluated in reports; ‘Culture at the Heart of Regeneration’ (DCMS, 2004); ‘Arts & Regeneration: Creating Vibrant Communities’ (ACE 2007), and the ‘Creative Britain’ Report (DCMS 2008).



The SeaChange initiative as a possible precedent for rural communities

Over the past three years the RCF has made a detailed study of these and other successful urban/regional arts and cultural regeneration projects. The Urban Cultural programme (2004 - 2006) funded by the Millennium Commission/ACE, and Sea Change initiatives are of interest in this context. The latter, in particular, because it targeted a mix of geographically dispersed urban seaside communities, and was also ambitious in terms of the scale and ambition of its artistic vision, strategic duration (i.e. 5 – 10 years), and also for the sustainable legacy it aims to achieve. These are very similar to the aims and the vision that the RCF has in mind for its rural cultural strategy.



Advocating a LEADER+ model of community-led rural cultural development

The EU EAGGF LEADER + initiative, administered and co-funded in this country by DEFRA, would also seem to offer a very useful precedent in this context for the development of rural community equivalent of the SeaChange initiative. The success and sustainability of the LEADER+ rural arts and regeneration projects was also mainly due to the bottom-up decision-making approach and an insistence on grassroots community leadership and management of all aspects of the project development, i.e. at parish, regional, national and transnational levels.



Extrapolating key elements for a sustainable rural cultural strategy

By using some elements of the successful urban cultural regeneration projects, Seachange and LEADER+ initiatives as precedents, it should be possible to extrapolate out some of the main characteristics or criteria for a future sustainable rural cultural investment strategy.



1 Differentiation and Focus There is a need to refocus some of the successful urban arts and regeneration methodologies to meet the needs of smaller, more regionally dispersed, and marginal rural communities, and also in responding to the complexities and challenges of achieving; healthy rural communities, rural environmental sustainability, a dynamic and creative rural economy, and also meeting the different cultural expectations and creative needs of regionally distinct farming and rural communities.

2 Ambition and Quality If adopted, the rural cultural strategy programme should be unashamedly ambitious and visionary in its scope, and would strive overall for the highest quality in terms of its artistic programmes, critical/aesthetic engagement and curatorial outputs. This would mean the involvement from the outset of leading national and international artists, new media experts, architects, designers, curators, and art consultants in the planning, production and delivery of the programmes.

3 Sustainability and Integrity The ultimate sustainability of a rural cultural strategy will also depend on the availability of strategic funding for projects and art development work, and over a minimum of five years initially. Also critical is the employment of a bottom-up LEADER+ style decision-making approach from the outset, and also ensuring a grassroots rural community involvement in all aspects of the development and implementation of the rural culture programmes during the life of the project.

National Rural Arts and Cultural Centre

International showcase for the best of contemporary British rural art, crafts, design and architecture.

4.1



International Exhibition Centre, National Agricultural Centre, Warwicks- which could provide a possible practical model or architectural template for a future national rural cultural centre

National Rural Cultural Centre - MoCCA Museum of Contemporary Countryside Art

Rural communities would benefit greatly from having their own National Rural Cultural Centre and contemporary art gallery – MoCCA (Museum of Contemporary Countryside Art). There is currently no national meeting place or a centre that can adequately accommodate or promote the full range of social, cultural, media, artistic and related community support and educational activities needed by rural and farming communities in England. Such a centre would also be accessible to urban communities, international visitors, scholars, school children, and tourists interested in all aspects of contemporary rural culture, and the arts, crafts and cultural traditions of our diversity of regional countryside landscapes and rural communities. The centre would also provide a national and international showcase at which to promote the best of contemporary rural arts, rural architecture and design, including regional rural foods and culinary arts. It would provide a much needed social and cultural focus promoting rural community confidence and self-esteem at a time of radical change and uncertainty in the countryside.

Rural communities propose a national centre for cultural and social exchange and experiment

For many years the annual Royal Agriculture Show, based at the National Agriculture Centre at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, functioned as a major national gathering point and business and cultural focus event for farming and rural communities everywhere. With the ending in 2009 of the Royal Show there is now no longer a national meeting place for rural communities or an arts and cultural centre open to both rural and urban communities. After ten years of witnessing new Arts Council and Lottery Funded prestige art galleries and cultural centres go up in urban contexts, and promoted as an integral part of major culture-led urban regeneration initiatives, rural leaders now feel that they too could now put forward a good case for a dedicated National Rural Cultural Centre and associated gallery of contemporary art and crafts of the countryside.

More a tonic than iconic; a powerful and enduring symbolic focus for all rural communities

Such a building would also provide rural communities with a powerful symbolic presence and recuperative focus at a time of economic uncertainty and radical social, environmental and cultural change in the countryside. Rural leaders are hoping for something more than yet another expensive 'Iconic' art gallery. Their ambitions in this context, are possibly more modest, and are also informed by a genuine desire to create a centre that is, in the long term, environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially inclusive, and would also be experimental and forward looking in terms of its institutional ethos. The Centre would fundamentally be a welcoming place, where urban community groups, urban arts and urban business leaders would also be made very welcome, and could meet with rural leaders and other farming cultural and social groups to share new ideas and plan future urban rural cultural collaborations. It would also aim to demonstrate in its design and construction all the latest advances in sustainable 'green' rural architecture, building design and energy conservation techniques.

A catalyst for rural economic regeneration?

Given the current economic downturn it may be naive to imagine that funding support for such a proposal would be that easy to obtain, no matter how compelling the arguments and needs for this might be. However, the proposal for a National Rural Cultural Centre has been under discussion for several years and has attracted a broad base of interest and support; urban and rural. If nothing else, the proposal could provide an opportunity for wider national public debate about the future of museums and rural architecture in the context of the new environmental and economic realities, and in support of related Government sustainability initiatives.



Proposal for a National Dairy Cow Museum and art gallery devoted to the history of cow and livestock cultures worldwide. Artist Radovan Kragulj

National Rural Arts and Cultural Centre

Planning the future National Rural Centre

Listed below are some other possible roles and functions for a proposed National Rural Cultural Centre that could be discussed at future stakeholder meetings.

In addition to generating a wider public debate around the possible programmes and aims for the proposed Centre, such debates would enable rural communities to acquire new confidence and skills in articulating their own cultural values and creative priorities.

Workgroups and consultancies; defining the centre's role. Each of the developmental strands listed under could also become the focus for some regional rural cultural centre workshop groups. Each comprising a range of rural community stakeholder groups, NGOs, artists, museum curators, arts consultants, media experts, designers and architects, etc. All working collaboratively to try and arrive at some concrete proposals and practical designs for the proposed National Rural Centre.



The Polish Pavilion for the Shanghai Expo 2010. Pavilion design was based on traditional Polish rural textile patterns, intended as a museum and tourism centre marketing Polish rural tourism, design products, foods and crafts

Proposed development strands for a National Rural Cultural Centre

1 Exploring new urban/rural cultural interfaces and business partnerships

An experimental, multi-functional arts centre providing a symbolic national focus for all rural community arts and cultural events. It would also be designed to be open and fully accessible to all urban, Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups and disadvantaged innercity communities. It would also serve as a venue for initiating and hosting major touring regional/national/international rural arts festivals, performing arts events and exhibitions.

2 A national centre promoting advanced sustainable rural design and architecture

A center for research and practical experiments promoting urban/rural sustainability through advanced design and new technologies. The Centre itself could be designed and constructed as an experiment in use of advanced sustainable rural architectural and design in practice, as well as demonstrating the enormous range of new rural skills and natural/vernacular materials and techniques available to urban and rural communities, and professionals (architects, designers, etc.) involved in all areas of sustainable design and construction.

3 Narratives of change - collecting and communicating the experiences and stories of rural communities

An experimental community-led rural living museum centre and oral archive project. The centre could coordinate a series of regional and national rural community museum and oral archive projects aimed at documenting some of the wider social, economic, cultural and environmental changes and issues now impacting in rural and farming communities and the countryside. Farming is also an oral or verbally communicated culture. This also needs study.

4 MoCCA - National Museum of Contemporary Countryside Art

Provision of an international standard national rural art museum or art gallery devoted to the commissioning and display of the best of contemporary rural arts, media, craft, design and architecture projects. This would include work by other urban and international artists and designers which in any way reflect or seek to address rural issues, rural needs and cultural agendas in various media or expressive forms. The MoCCA project could also provide an international showcase and study centre for a wide range of new rural arts, art and agriculture, art and sustainability, and public arts.

5 A National Rural Social Documentary Centre

Venue for a future national rural documentary film, video and photographic exhibitions and new commissions initiative, with a brief to promote new work by professional photographers, film makers media artists for consumption by both rural and urban audiences.

6 New Rural Community Media and broadcast training centre

Provision of a national conference, new media/communications and training centre for rural communities, and as a new centre and focus for development and integration of future rural communications, rural community broadcasting, and digital media projects.

7 National Rural creative/cultural skills education and training centre

Provision of a national rural creative, cultural skills and training centre for all rural communities and artists. Also providing training and professional support for rural artists and designers in all areas of the creative and cultural industries work. promoting innovative arts in rural health, arts and rural social inclusion, and rural crafts and design initiatives.



Chipping Community Radio operated as a vital support network during the Foot and Mouth crisis

International Rural Biennale

4.2

"We are instigating a [rural consortium] bid for The UK City of Culture 2013 as we know the countryside has just as much to offer culturally as any city in the UK".*

Andy Woodward, CEO FarmStay UK, 2009.



A possible venue for a future Rural Biennale could be The Royal Show grounds, Stoneleigh, Warwicks.

International Rural Biennale - promoting urban rural sustainability initiatives

A proposal to establish a programme of international rural biennales and exhibitions of contemporary art in new rural contexts, including development of new arts-led urban/rural cultural sustainability and economic regeneration partnerships, and innovative rural tourism and creative rural economy projects. Such a programme would engage both urban and rural arts and media professionals and cultural experts in devising more environmental and economically sustainable forms of international contemporary art events. Developed and coordinated at roughly two yearly intervals, and located in different geographical regions, they would also act as important professional showcases promoting some of the exciting new range of innovative rural arts, new rural media, rural design and Art and Agriculture projects now emerging internationally.

Creative engines - promoting new artistic and cultural discourses

International contemporary art biennales and visual arts festivals are now widely employed by cities and regions, and supported by political leaders, as a practical means of attracting new cultural funding for urban regeneration, and in pump-priming other urban renewal and civic social and property investment projects. They also help by lending a positive and dynamic image to host cities and communities suffering the effects of urban post-industrial decline and economic recession. Of these, the Venice Biennale and the Kassel Documenta are perhaps the best known and, as such, now serve as a major focus for the world's growing creative economy and the international contemporary art market. They also function as powerful intellectual centres and advanced art research arenas for the professional art world. In this context, it might also be worth trying to interest some of the leading international art museums e.g. Tate Britain or Tate Modern, etc., to consider staging a major international (or UK focused) survey exhibition, documenting the (re)emergence of agriculture, the countryside and rural issues as an interesting new zone for contemporary critical art practice and curatorship; i.e. Art and Agriculture as a new artistic genre.

Rural Biennales: generating new narratives for economic and environmental sustainability

In recent years there has been a veritable explosion in the number of international biennales sponsored by cities and nations around the world; venues include Istanbul, Sydney, Hong Kong, China, Dubai, and South Korea. But critics are increasingly concerned that these mainly prestige-driven international art events have become too exclusively urban-orientated and art consumerist in ethos, that they seem no longer to be economically or environmentally sustainable. This then opens the way for the development of a new type of international art exhibition or Biennale event. One that, for example, could focus on generating some radical new artistic visions and cultural narratives aimed at achieving full environmental and economic sustainability. Such a programme of sustainability-orientated Rural Biennales could also take the initiative internationally by promoting new creative urban rural partnerships and innovative arts strategies for environmental and economic sustainability.

New cultural strategies for environmental sustainability

A 'Sustainable Cultures Rural Biennale' programme could also help open up some alternative cultural and curatorial strategies or discourses. Establishing the first international art biennale programme devoted to engaging both creative urban and rural communities and cultural entrepreneurs in the documentation and exploration of more environmentally and economically sustainable Biennale models, would also help to surface some interesting new cultural-environmental sustainability policy discourses.

**This bid was rejected at the preliminary stage by the UK City of Culture Executive*

A vernacular headquarters building for a future Rural Biennale?
A straw-bale castle constructed by the Dutch 'Peer Group' artists, which functioned as a temporary national rural exhibitions, conference and performing arts centre in the Netherlands, 2006



International Rural Biennale



The Liverpool Biennale helped to contribute to the estimated £800 million turnover of the Liverpool '08 European Capital of Culture event

Planning a future programme of Rural Biennales

For the sake of brevity we have borrowed the criteria developed for the UK City of Culture initiative by DCMS (Equality in Impact Assessment, July 2009), and slightly reconfigured its Cultural and Artistic, Social and Economic priorities to demonstrate how these might translate out as possible objectives for a Rural Biennale and international contemporary art programme. That is, one devoted to surfacing new more socially responsible and economic and environmentally sustainable cultural agendas.

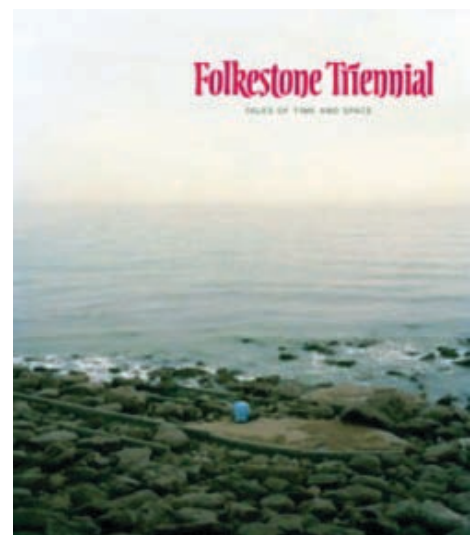
Proposed time frame and budget for a Rural Biennale

Most international art biennale events last from between 15 - 20 weeks, and require a minimum of two to three years lead-in development time. To maximize their full economic regeneration potential and promote related cultural tourism, artistic and public benefits, they are generally conceived of and coordinated over 10 - 20 year cycles. Given the experimental nature of the proposed Rural Biennale it is recommended that an initial trajectory of three rural biennales could be considered. Each signature rural biennale event being presented every two years, running approximately from about 2013 through to 2017. The events could be rotated so as to benefit different rural regions/counties, and also feature partnership arrangements with different regional AONBs, National Parks, National Trust, etc. The 2008 Liverpool Biennale cost just over £3 million, and the 2007 Folkestone Triennale (part of the SeaChange cultural programme) cost around £2.1 million to stage. Some of this money came from the National Lottery Arts programme, the Arts Council, and other national and regional funding partners and business sponsors.

Priorities for developing a future sustainable Rural Biennale

In addition to referencing the key arguments listed in Section 4. above: 'Why a rural cultural strategy?', some future Rural Biennale programmes could also be deployed to open up interesting new theoretical, aesthetical and creative fields for curators, artists and rural communities to consider further. In addition these would:

- 1 enable rural communities and farmers to access to new cultural resources, and deploy a wide range of new arts and cultural projects in support of mainstream rural regeneration and farm diversification initiatives;
- 2 encourage urban artists, curators, designers, and architects, etc., to also consider developing a range of exciting new arts projects and commissions for challenging new rural and agricultural contexts;
- 3 develop innovative creative rural economy and cultural tourism projects, and engender a sustainable legacy of new rural community festivals and arts and cultural events;
- 4 explore and consolidate new urban/rural cultural diversity and creative business partnerships, and promote new arts projects aimed at tackling issues of rural racism, isolation and social exclusion in rural areas;
- 5 identify new aesthetic, ethical, social and intellectual issues and challenges in rural contexts, which could also perhaps inform future policy discourses about the future of agriculture and rural development.
- 6 experiment and generate new artistic and cultural formations and strategies capable of informing and engaging wider public support for other key Government environmental and economic sustainability initiatives.



The Folkestone Triennial international art project received £2.1 million from the SeaChange initiative for regeneration of the seaside town economies in the south east.

Creative Rural Economy Investment Programme

4.3



Farmer Michael Eavis and the Glastonbury Festival alone generates almost £100 million p.a. to the national creative economy

“..with a strategic rural cultural investment programme, similar in scope to the SeaChange seaside towns initiatives, then the rural contribution to the national creative economy could well be doubled over the next five to ten years”

Michael Hart, Chairman of the RCF 2010

Increasing the rural contribution to the national creative economy

One of the RCF's main campaign objectives has been in promoting support for the emerging creative rural economy. This work first began with the International Creative Rural Economy conference which was held at the University of Lancaster in September 2006. The aims of the conference were: (i) to document some of the salient characteristics of the emerging creative rural economy and related rural community cultural capital initiatives; (ii) to identify and describe models of best rural creative economy practice, within professional arts, SME businesses, farming, and rural community contexts; (iii) to assess and find new ways of releasing the significant untapped creative potential and cultural capital latent within rural communities; and, (iv) to make recommendations for future creative rural economy research and development work.

Consolidating the creative rural economy

This later resulted in a proposal for a five year Creative Rural Economy R&D investment programme (2010 – 2015) to be based in the NW region. Although the proposal failed to attract support from NWDA, Arts Council NW, or DCMS, it was supported by rural communities and businesses. Had it gone ahead, it would have included an initial two year phase of pilot projects and development work, capable of assessing the full economic contribution being made by creative rural communities and artists to the national creative economy. The study also proposed to:

1. map out the characteristics of the emergent creative rural industries,
2. create an information network to support artists, designers and rural communities interested in the creative rural economy,
3. flag up the findings to the statutory agencies (DCMS, DEFRA, Arts Council and Rural Community Council), for taking forward and implementation as a three year national creative rural economy investment programme.

Assessing the full economic potential of the creative rural sector.

Based on available statistics, NGO reports and other anecdotal evidence collected for the 2006 conference, it was estimated then that the likely contribution currently being made by the various rural 'creative' sectors to the national creative economy was in the region of £500 million* p.a.. Taking into account the numerous other arts festivals, new rural media initiatives, contemporary rural crafts, rural design and architecture and other cultural activities taking place in the countryside, it is possible to conclude that the rural sector is now contributing far in excess of the estimated £500 million p.a. to the national creative economy. This includes the contributions from all the professional urban artists, designers, musicians, film makers and other creatives known to be active in rural areas and, the equally significant contributions being made to the creative economy by rural tourism, rural heritage, rural foods (culinary arts) and beverage outlets, and other countryside recreational arts and sporting activities. There is now an urgent need to undertake a major study and accurate assessment of the full economic and social contribution being made by farmer creatives (e.g. Glastonbury), and other professional and community-led arts and culture initiatives to local rural economies. And, equally important, a detailed study and assessment also needs to be undertaken of the major contribution now being made by the rural sector to the national creative economy.

*The above figure of £500 million p.a. contribution to the national creative was calculated using the following data:

1. 'The decorative rafts contribute an estimated £1 billion to national income; the [traditional] rural crafts, including the building trades, perhaps £300 – 350 million', Crafts in the English Countryside report pg. 7, (Collins/Countryside Agency, 2004).
2. '[Reportedly] the Glastonbury Festival generates around £75 million to the local economy but I would say it is closer to £100 million p.a.'. Michael Eavis, Dairy farmer and creative rural entrepreneur (2009).
3. 'DCMS estimates that the urban creative industries contribute £60 billion annually to the national economy. Even calculating the rural sector's contribution at around 1% of this total, would seem to support these figures' [i.e. £500 million], Creative Rural Economy conference report, 2007.



Delegates at the plenary session - Rural Creative Rural Economy Conference, Lancaster University, Sept. 2006

Measuring the contribution made by the rural sector to the national creative economy

The RCF is concerned that current CI research methodologies, having been mainly developed for use in urban contexts, appear to miss out on significant potential new development areas in the creative rural economy. If the rural creative sector is to continue to make its full contribution to the national economy, there is a clear need for some sectoral differentiation in terms of data collection and the development of more inclusive and sensitised 'rural CI' research methodologies. As identified by DCMS (Creative Britain report, 2008), and employed in current CI research, some of the urban creative industries revenue classifications that could well also apply in rural contexts include: Advertising, Architecture, Art and Antiques, Computer and Video games, Crafts and Design, Designer Fashion, Film and Video, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing, Software, Television and Radio.

The 'hidden' Creative Rural Economy

While some of the above may also operate in rural areas, possibly generating other hitherto unrecorded rural contributions to the creative economy, the full extent of the contribution made by these and other rural creative sectors to the national economy has never been differentiated statistically, or supported in full by independent research. This presents two other problems for the rural CI sector: (1) the full extent of the contribution made by the rural creative economy to the national economy remains 'invisible' and so will continue to be miscalculated as part of the urban sector's CI contribution. (2) Consequently the competitive edge and capacity for future investment and expansion of rural creatives and the creative rural economy sector will be further constrained and continue to suffer from the effects of chronic under-investment and economic marginalisation.

Differentiation and widening the scope of creative rural economic research

One of the potential creative rural investment areas that might also benefit from further study and statistical evaluation, is the contribution to the national creative economy made by professional artists, craftspeople and designers (including architects, fashion and textiles, musicians, new media, theatre, film and video makers) now working and living in the rural community. The RCF believes that this latter sector's contribution, when properly documented and analysed, would be likely to equal - and possibly even surpass - the £500 million p.a. estimates quoted previously. But until a comprehensive study has been undertaken this will have to remain a matter of conjecture.

Areas of creative rural sector activity that could benefit from further study

A brief list of other areas of creative rural economic/CI activity worthy of study include:

- land-based creative industries, and new arts-led alternative land-use projects
- farmer creatives, art farms, and art and agriculture/cultural entrepreneurs
- contemporary rural crafts and design, and new architecture initiatives in rural areas
- rural digital arts, new rural media, rural web/net and tele-communications
- new rural festivals, international art biennales and urban/rural cultural events
- public art and sculpture trails in the countryside, and arts-led rural cultural tourism
- new rural architecture, creative rural settlements, new rural housing and workspaces
- rural culinary arts, culture-led outdoor recreational, heritage and sports events

Promoting further research in this context

Could include:

- a national audit of rural community creativity and community 'cultural capital'
- a study of development of new urban/rural cultural diversity-based creative businesses and partnerships
- evaluation of the contribution to rural CIs by migrant workers, New Age Travellers, and Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities
- evaluation of the contribution made by rural women's creative enterprises and home-based domestic rural arts, crafts and cultural initiatives
- investigation of new creative economy uses for farmed materials in the fashion and textiles industry (wool, leather, hemp, flax, fur, straw, linen, cottons, etc.)
- evaluation of the part played in the creative economy by rural food cultures and regional rural culinary traditions and related gourmet products and services.



The Creative Rural Economy



Australian and Canadian rural communities have been inspired by the RCF's work in promoting the creative rural economy in Britain

"Our creative industries are some of the best in the world..They already employ 2 million people and constitute over 7% of GDP [and] contribute £60bn to the UK economy every year, with exports alone worth at least £13bn.. no other country can offer such rich history, wonderful culture, or stunning countryside, and it's important we showcase to the world the amazing range of attractions and experiences this country offers."

Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt Secretary of State, DCMS



International recognition for the UK's creative rural industries

The RCF's pioneering work in promoting the Creative Rural Economy has attracted growing international recognition and contributed to the development of a number of similar initiatives; in the Netherlands - The Kasteel Groeneveld Creative Rural Economy Conference, 2008; in Canada - the Prince Edward County Creative Rural Economy Initiative, Ontario; and in Australia, with the establishment of ACRE, the first Australian Creative Rural Economy conference, held in Northern Victoria in November 2009.

Richard Florida, widely acknowledged as one of the leading international gurus and pioneers of the Creative Industries, has also commented favourably on the RCF's pioneering work in this context.

"What you are doing is very important.. the knowledge industries and creative rural economy and environmental sustainability will be the likely key drivers in determining the next major breakthrough areas and challenges for the creative industries. We need to.. [document and analyse] the new patterns of creativity and cultural employment across the urban-rural spectrum".

Richard Florida (2006), author of 'The Creative Class'.



Richard Florida - the Creative Rural Economy is the next big thing..

A Creative Rural Economy Centre of Excellence?

Britain now has a unique opportunity to take the lead internationally in promoting consultancy work and marketing of its intellectual expertise in development and research work related to the emergent creative rural economy. The RCF, and other researchers and consultants also active in the field, have developed an impressive body of knowledge and expertise relating to most aspects of the creative rural economy, and that have the potential to become a useful part of the nations' knowledge economy export market. In this context DCMS recently confirmed its resolve to ensure Britain's lead in the CIs by "working closely with key players across Government to address and monitor policy that affects the Creative Industries", and by funding the establishment of a number of new regional Creative Industries Centres of Excellence.

A Rural C&binet?

The establishment of the C&binet international CI network is another very good example of how DCMS is working to influence world leaders from the creative and financial industries; "to help ensure that our creative industries continue to grow and thrive" (DCMS website, January 2010). The RCF would therefore like to suggest that some form of similar CI investment programme be considered for the rural sector, and targeted at sustaining Britain's evident world leadership in the Creative Rural Economy. This process could also be considerably aided if: (i) DEFRA were involved in future cross-Government Departmental discussions with DCMS, etc., about promoting future creative rural economy initiatives, in this country and overseas; (ii) if a dedicated national Creative Rural Economy/Industries Centre of Excellence could be established; and, (iii) that an invitation could also be extended to UK rural sector leaders and rural CI development agency representation to attend future C&binet planning meetings and conferences.

New Rural Design and Architecture Initiative

4.4

Architecture and design have a major role to play in defining the new post-agricultural rural landscapes and economies.

Rethinking rural design in new economic and environmental contexts

The scale of the economic, environmental and demographic factors now impacting on rural areas are rapidly changing the appearance and function of the countryside. They are also engendering radical new types of rural landscapes, land management practices, human settlement patterns in the countryside. These, in turn, offer new creative opportunities and intellectual challenges for architects, planners and designers. Coupled with the cumulative impacts of climate change, increased urban migration into the countryside, renewable energy initiatives, and CAP reform-driven changes in agriculture, are also generating new demands for innovative architectural and design solutions. Including provision of affordable rural housing, new rural work spaces, and other advanced design-led solutions for more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable farming methods.

Towards a new rural architecture?

Architects were also instrumental in developing the post-modern cultural agendas which introduced some radical new thinking about the future of our cities and the post-industrial urban economies, which also resulted in the development of the successful culture-led urban regeneration and related creative industries initiatives. Some 40 years on, there is no reason why leading designers and architects could not also be persuaded to do the same for the rural sector, and help re-imagine the 'post-agricultural' rural economy and landscapes, by promoting imaginative ways of thinking about future development in the countryside. This would encourage the growth of exciting new design and architectural projects in rural areas, and help countryside planners and local authority policy makers to gain confidence and experience in accommodating and managing some of the more radical and unanticipated changes now impacting on rural communities and farm environments.

Anticipating the new rural design economy.

Architects and designers are contributing to the creative rural economy by developing a wide range of new value-added rural design products, innovative marketing campaigns for rural tourism and recreational facilities, and new rural built landscape and settlement formations. They are also opening up important new markets and applications for traditional rural construction skills and materials in both the urban and rural construction industries. These include new uses for farm-sourced sustainable timber, stone, earth, and wool for insulation, in eco housing, school playgrounds and sustainable landscape schemes. Engineers, designers and architects are collaborating in the design of innovative agricultural machinery (e.g. tractors, harvesters, hoists, tools), innovative agri-engineering systems, new rural recreational land forms, field cropping systems (Precision Farming), farm energy systems (bio-mass), farm effluent management systems, and farm foods processing plants.



Traditional rural skills such as thatching, and straw bale construction are now being used in a wide range of new urban and rural architectural contexts

Rural social housing and community design.

The demographics of rural change (i.e. issues about second-home ownership and rising land prices, the influx of migrant workers and urban life-stylers into rural areas) are also putting new pressures on existing rural housing stock and, are eroding the capacity of some rural communities to manage these changes. This provides architects and planners with yet other important new intellectual challenges and creative opportunities, and by working more closely with local rural communities to address the need for more affordable rural housing provision, that are also socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.



New Rural mansions - traditional thatching techniques and modern construction. Uchida/ Findlay Partnership

Rural Design and Architecture

Re-thinking design in the context of rural change

Designing-in rural environmental sustainability

Farming is allegedly one of the main contributors to global warming, mainly through methane (cattle) and CO2 emissions into the environment. But it also has the potential, through carbon sequestration, promotion of biomass energy initiatives, and new effluent disposal methods, an opportunity to mitigate the impact not only of its own activities, but also to a certain extent those of the cities. Here too, where farmers are increasingly diversifying into new non-food, fibre, and energy crops, architects and designers are helping invent and produce new and more sustainable field cropping and farm energy processing systems i.e. designing in futurerural environmental and energy sustainability.

Integrating sustainability and rural development

There is already a revolution taking place in terms of design in the countryside. Some of this work has recently been documented in professional journals but, much remains still to be done indocumenting and promoting instances of good rural design and architecture practice. It is recommended that a new rural design professional network and annual conference be established, to help advance and promote more new work and research in this context. A useful precedent for this could be the Rural Studio project in Alabama, and DOTT - Designs on the Times design and sustainability projects supported recently by the Design Council in the NE and SW regions.

Setting new standards in affordable rural housing design.

Other successful examples of creative applications of advanced design for affordable rural community housing include the Rural Studio in Alabama, where architectural students and staff have worked alongside low income rural residents to design and construct affordable housing of the highest quality and design standard. www.cadc.auburn.edu/rural-studio
In the USA the DESIGN CORPS architectural practice have been pioneering 'humane housing projects' for use by migrant farm workers. <http://www.designcorps.org/projects> and in the Scottish Highlands the Rural Design architectural team have also been producing award winning rural housing and museum designs of international standard. www.ruraldesign.co.uk

Enhancing new markets for the rural design economy

Other examples of the new rural design economy in agricultural contexts include the Omlet Company's 'Eglu' project, led by two ex RCA design graduates who spotted a niche in the backyard hobby farming market for their engaging designer henhouse products. www.omlet.co.uk
At the other end of the spectrum are the examples of the JCB digger company and Massey Ferguson, which have pioneered major new world export markets; i.e. "Think Red" and advanced ergonomics in tractor and farm machinery design. Farm tractors also attract as much public interest, in design terms, as do cars with motor enthusiasts and urban consumers. www.masseyferguson.com



Recycled grain storage silo used for housing



An award winning design for a new cowshed by the Rural Studio project, Alabama www.cadc.auburn.edu/rural-studio



The Eglu project introducing advanced urban design into education and urban farming www.omlet.co.uk



Tractor and agricultural machinery design also make an important contribution to the rural design economy and export earnings.

Planning the future rural economic landscapes

A new post-agricultural rural design aesthetic?

The term 'post-agricultural', however, does not mean the end of agriculture as such. This is quite impossible. However, what the term does signal is the need for a radical re-think and wider public debate about the future of agriculture in the context of society's overarching cultural, social and economic needs and expectations. Sustainable energy initiatives; wind farms, willow coppice for bio-mass and other recreational uses for surplus farmland are also presenting architects, engineers and landscape designers with exciting new intellectual and creative design challenges, and in working with farmers to formulate post-agricultural rural economies, settlements, and landscapes.

Towards a sustainable rural design vernacular

Some examples of visionary designer/engineer/artists who have also been successful in building up international consultancies in designer-led solutions to agricultural and urban waste treatment systems, and in inculcating design-led environmental sustainability solutions in farming and urban contexts are; David Thackrey of Designs on the Times (DOTT), and the gifted Vietnamese/American artist/engineer Viet Ngo, whose LEMNA (duck weed) combining large scale water treatment as landart projects have provoked wonder and admiration.

New rural contexts for professional design research

What might help in consolidating these new creative challenge and opportunities would be to commission a major study of the full range and scope of current new rural design and architecture projects in the countryside, including references to any similar initiatives under development internationally. These could perhaps also form the basis of a future 'New Rural Design' conference and publication.

International New Rural Design Biennale/symposium

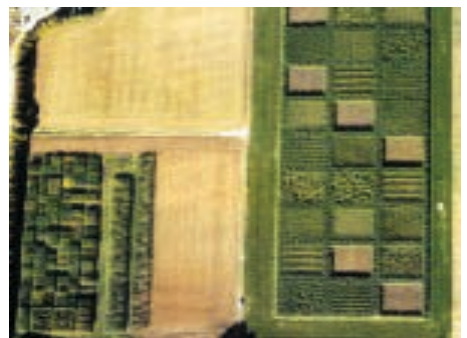
A Rural Design forum and touring exhibition could also help bring designers and architects together with rural and farming leaders, to discuss future options and collaborative projects. It would also help to take some of these interesting new rural design initiatives forward, if the Design Council, CABI, RIBA, RIBDA (Rural Industrial Building Association) with the Arts Council and Crafts Council could also meet with DEFRA and the NFU, RASE, Rural Cultural Forum, etc., to discuss the possibility of establishing a pilot New Rural Design R&D programme. It might also be possible to dedicate one of proposed future International Rural Biennales to showcasing the best of British and international new sustainable rural design, housing and architecture initiatives, including an accompanying publication and conference around the same subject.



Lemna Corp, new designs for water filtration systems



Rural landscapes are being redesigned to accommodate new sustainable energy systems



New Willow bio-mass trial plantations, Long Ashton Bristol



'Architecture and design have a major role to play in defining the future post-agricultural rural economy and landscapes'.

Ian Hunter, Littoral Arts Trust

New cultural and recreational landscapes are now also emerging in rural England - e.g. Glastonbury Festival

Grains of Truth - National rural documentary programme

4.5

National Rural Documentary Initiative

The changes taking place in the countryside due to the increasing globalisation of regional economies, coupled with CAP reform, and the drive for sustainable solutions to global warming, are impacting in quite unexpected ways on the social, economic and environmental fabric of rural communities. It is therefore important to try and create an ongoing record of these radical changes using all of the available cultural, new media, artistic and documentary tools and resources at our disposal.

Documenting Rural Change

Understanding rural change and reinforcing rural community self-esteem

The scale and speed of the changes to the rural environment also mean that they are difficult to comprehend or measure using conventional statistical data. It is also difficult for rural communities to manage change if, because of environmental and economic circumstances beyond their control, they feel powerless to act or unable take immediate positive action, as was the situation during the devastating Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001. Such sudden disruptions to rural life (flooding, pandemics, market failure, etc.), combined with the slow deterioration in rural living conditions due to cut-backs and declining social services, are further exacerbating the loss of rural identity and sense of social cohesion, as the traditional concepts and role of rural community, agriculture, and the countryside seemingly begin to fall apart.

Some precedents for a national rural cultural documentary initiative

Against this background the RCF is strongly advocating that a national rural cultural documentary initiative should be set up to address these important rural social issues and needs. The main precedent for such a nationally coordinated rural documentary scheme being the FSA (Farm Security Administration) programme funded in the 1930s by the US Department of Agriculture <www.memory.loc.gov/fsowhome.html>, in response to the collapse in sharecropping farming in the SW USA, due to adverse climate factors 'the Dust Bowl' and the on-set of the great depression. Other successful rural social documentary initiatives include DATAR, a documentary project initiated by the French Government documenting change in the regional landscapes of France, which resulted in a major publication; 'Paysages Photographies' (<www.datar.gouv.fr>). Pioneering rural documentation projects have also undertaken in this country by the Beaford Arts Ravilious Archive, Devon, and by the Amber/Side Gallery, Newcastle, and the Rural Media Company in Hereford. Citing these and other precedents, rural leaders and professional photographers, film makers and artists, etc., are now calling for the introduction of a nationally coordinated rural documentary initiative which, if it is to be effective, would need to be developed and sustained over a minimum of 5 years initially.



Dorothea Lange: 'Migrant Mother', 1930's U.S. FSA Farm Securities Administration Documentation project

A national rural documentary would enable rural communities to respond positively and imaginatively to the radical changes now taking place in the countryside



Photographers, film-makers and artists collaborated with rural communities to document the impact of the 2001 FMD (Foot and Mouth) outbreak

Imagining new rural economic and social outcomes

Such a project, it is argued, would help rural communities both to understand their natural strengths and to review the economic, social and environmental problems facing them in a new and positive light. It might also help them to frame new creative and imaginative responses to some underlying rural issues and problems. A possible advantage in mounting a rural social documentary initiative here, is the availability of a large number of experienced documentary film makers, photographers, artists, and new media practitioners, etc., many of whom have already been pioneering elements of a national rural documentary programme on their own initiative.

Grains of Truth – A rural documentary record for our own time?

New artistic and aesthetic responses to the countryside

While it may be useful, in arguing for public funding for such projects, to underline the economic, social and environmental benefits they will bring, it is important to also point out that the use of photography, film, new media and other art forms for social documentation can of course result in important new artworks of the highest international standard. Other new artistic, critical and aesthetic outcomes are also possible from rural documentray work, including the formulation of a possible new post-agricultural landscape and aesthetic discourse, which in turn could inform future countryside planning and, related to this, future rural design, planning and architecture policy.



Photograph, James Ravillious ©
Beaford Arts archive



'I Packed this Myself' documenting
migrant rural workers in the South West
of England - Bridging Arts

A National Rural Cultural Document project

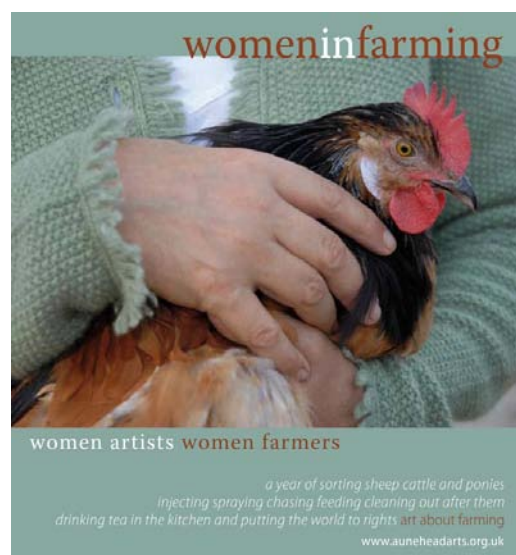
In basic terms what is being proposed here is the development and implementation of a national (5 – 10 year) rural documentation initiative, involving as wide a range of photographers, film makers, writers and new media practitioners as possible, working in partner-ship with rural communities and farming leaders. And aiming, ultimately, at the creation of a comprehensive national record and multi-stranded social and cultural document of rural life, countryside and farming during these critical first decades of the 21st century. Such a record would also be likely to emerge and endure as a major international art work and cultural statement in its own right. Similar, in both scope and influence perhaps, to the US Library of Congress FSA rural documentray archive. Part of which is also on permanent display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Grains of truth rural documentary project

The idea for such a documentation project has been in development for a number of years, with pilot projects part-funded by Arts Council England (North West, and East and West Midlands 2004 - 2006). The title 'Grains of Truth' was also chosen in homage to the 'grainy' black and white images for which the American FSA project is celebrated. It also recognises the intellectual, artistic and professional rigour that will be required of artists and photographers willing to work with rural communities to assemble such a major documentary record.

New Rural Documentary Photography Biennale

The works produced during the life time of the rural documentary initiative would later go to form the basis of a permanent archive to be housed at the National Rural Cultural Centre, and for use with future International Rural Biennale exhibitions, conferences and publications. In addition, the RCF would like to see an international new rural documentary conference and exhibition, organised in this country, at some point over the next three years. A major publication devoted to this subject could also be considered.



Jennie Hayes photographer, Aune Head Arts:
Flier for 'Women in Farming' project

Rural Diversities - New urban rural cultural partnerships

4.6



AWAD- Manchester based African women's cultural group developed a healthy foods marketing project in collaboration with Lancashire hill farming families

New urban/rural partnerships - addressing the cultural needs of marginalised rural sectors

Rural Diversities – supporting new urban/rural cultural partnerships and understanding

One of the longer term aims of the Rural Cultural Strategy is the establishment of a coordinated programme of arts-led rural cultural diversity projects, aimed variously at widening new access to the countryside, and opening farming life and rural cultural events to Black, Asian and urban Minority Ethnic groups. Also by introducing them to the possibility of developing new cultural and business partnerships with rural communities. In this context, there is also scope for developing new creative and artistic strategies aimed at combating racism in the countryside, and in working in longer-term partnerships with urban BME communities, many of whom come originally from traditional rural backgrounds. There is also a need to develop new and more culturally inclusive rural cultural events that are open to urban and other ethnic cultural minorities, as well as encouraging greater awareness of cultural diversity issues within rural and farming communities in general. Other work in this context could include arts-based social inclusion work with young people, rural elders, migrant rural workers, and Gypsy/Traveller communities.



New Black and Asian communities have been encouraged to access the countryside through the MOSAIC scheme

Promoting rural access and a warm welcome for all to the countryside

In this context, the proposed Rural Diversities programme is seeking to follow up pioneering work of the National Parks MOSAIC project, an ambitious cultural exchange programme aimed at increasing BME access to the countryside, sponsored by the National Parks. Other successful urban/rural cultural initiatives have been run by the National Trust, the Commission for Rural Communities, FACE, and the Royal Agricultural Show/RASE. The specific need to encourage greater awareness of cultural diversity issues within rural communities, and promote arts-led social inclusion with young people, rural elders and Gypsy/Traveller communities is being addressed by arts/media companies such as Bridging Arts, with the 'I This Myself' programme with rural migrant workers, and the Rural Media Company in Hereford who work with Roma communities and the Travellers' Times magazine.

Here to Stay; encouraging new cultural and economic partnerships for the countryside.

More Black and Asian families are now coming to live in rural villages, and are increasingly playing important role in the farming community and economy. Whilst efforts to provide wider access to the countryside by cultural minorities and engage them in rural recreational and cultural activities are good in themselves, the RCF would like to go one step further and would aim to build new and more sustainable urban rural cultural partnerships. However, these are not new ideas.

The Black Farmer Initiative

The Black Farmer, for example, has established a successful national and international marketing profile for his farm-based services and food products. There are also a number of farming enterprises now owned and managed by families from culturally diverse and urban backgrounds. Rather than being considered as 'exotics', these valuable new creative incomers should be welcomed into the fabric of rural life, and valued and recognised as adding to the cultural richness and economic resilience of rural communities.



Wilfred Emmanuel - Jones, The Black Farmer. A unique cultural branding enterprise marketing farm foods and cultural activities on his farm

Rural bio-diversity and diversifying the rural economy

"I will work across government and beyond to respond to the challenges of increasing food production, adapting to climate change, protecting our natural environment and ensuring we live sustainably."

Rt. Hon. Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State, DEFRA



Promoting safe food and urban/rural reconnections are also an important cultural tasks

Food cultures connects up everybody

One of the keys to promoting environmental sustainability and bio-diversity is with the provision of safe food, and maintenance of food sovereignty. Many urban communities, environmental NGOs (e.g. WFU, Sustain) and urban farms understand this very well, and are promoting a wide range of healthy eating and sustainable urban food and farming initiatives.

CPUL (Continuous Production Urban Landscapes) project is another good example of this and, in New York recently, artists, architects and farmers helped curators to collaborate on developing Public Farm 1 project, sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art and PSI Contemporary Art Space, in Brooklyn.



Urban farming projects, sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art, New York
Tending the cold frames installed as part of the Public Farm 1 project Brooklyn

Rural Cultural Embassies - promoting new urban/rural food and farming alliances

In this context the Rural Cultural Forum and the LITTORAL Arts Trust have recently put forward a proposal; 'Your Rural Neighbours' project for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. This has been shortlisted by the UK Legacy Trust to the Stage II bidding process. If successful in getting through to Stage III, this could involve urban and farming communities around the country working closely together to promote wider public understanding and participation in sustainable food, farming and environmental sustainability initiatives, as part of a upland rural community artistic contribution to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games cultural programme. Central to this are the proposed Rural Cultural Embassies which will be established in each of the lead Olympic Urban Boroughs (e.g. Greenwich, Newham, etc.), ahead of the Olympic Games. The Embassies would function as temporary exhibitions centres promoting a range of information about regional rural tourism, farming traditions, foods, landscapes, and other countryside cultural attractions.

Culturally enfranchising marginal rural and fishing port communities

Another aim of a future rural cultural diversities strategy is in securing new cultural resources and investment to help other economically disadvantaged and/or marginal rural and fishing port communities. In this content the RCF aims to prioritise support for hill farming and uplands rural communities; the cultural needs of Roma/Gypsy/traveller communities in rural areas, and the fishing port communities who are still trying cope with the imposition of fishing quotas and the decline in the home fishing industry.



Facing an uncertain future? Hill farming communities in South Lakeland, Cumbria. 'A Rare Breed' photographic essay by Rob Fraser



EU funded Roma Route of Culture documenting the contribution of Gypsy, traveller and Roma communities to European culture



'Fishing port communities are also undergoing radical cultural and economic change'. Decommissioning of some fishing boats as a result of EU restrictions on fishing quotas

Fashion and Farming- Contemporary Rural Crafts

4.7

The New Rural Crafts

In the conclusion to The Crafts in England's Countryside: Towards a Future Report (Countryside Commission 2004) Professor E.J.T Collins stated that '...the decorative crafts contribute an estimated £1 billion to national income. And, of this, the rural traditional crafts, including the building trades, perhaps £300 – £350 million' p.a.. However, the study did not claim to take in all sectors of craft-related activity in rural areas and, in consequence, omitted other significant areas of crafts-based creative rural economy contributions. These include the contemporary rural crafts, textiles, and other community-based rural and farming craft activities which are also important in the context of the creative rural economy.

Widening the definitions of rural crafts

Other crafts not included in the study, include rural land management crafts and creative skills which are vital to rural tourism, heritage and other landscape-based activities connected with the creative rural economy. These include traditional craft skills associated with animal husbandry, animal welfare and rural veterinary practice; hedge-laying, coppice crafts, walling and fencing, and horticultural and orchard craft skills. Also worthy of further study, in a creative economic context, are the wide range of hitherto undocumented rural community crafts and amateur arts and craft activity located in villages and market towns, which also make a significant contribution to the local rural economy. In addition, there are numerous farm-based metal crafts, furniture design and ceramics SMEs, and other design/engineering/crafts associated with the manufacture of farm machinery, animal handling systems, equestrian equipment, and outdoor rural sport and recreation equipment.

The 'hidden' rural craft economy

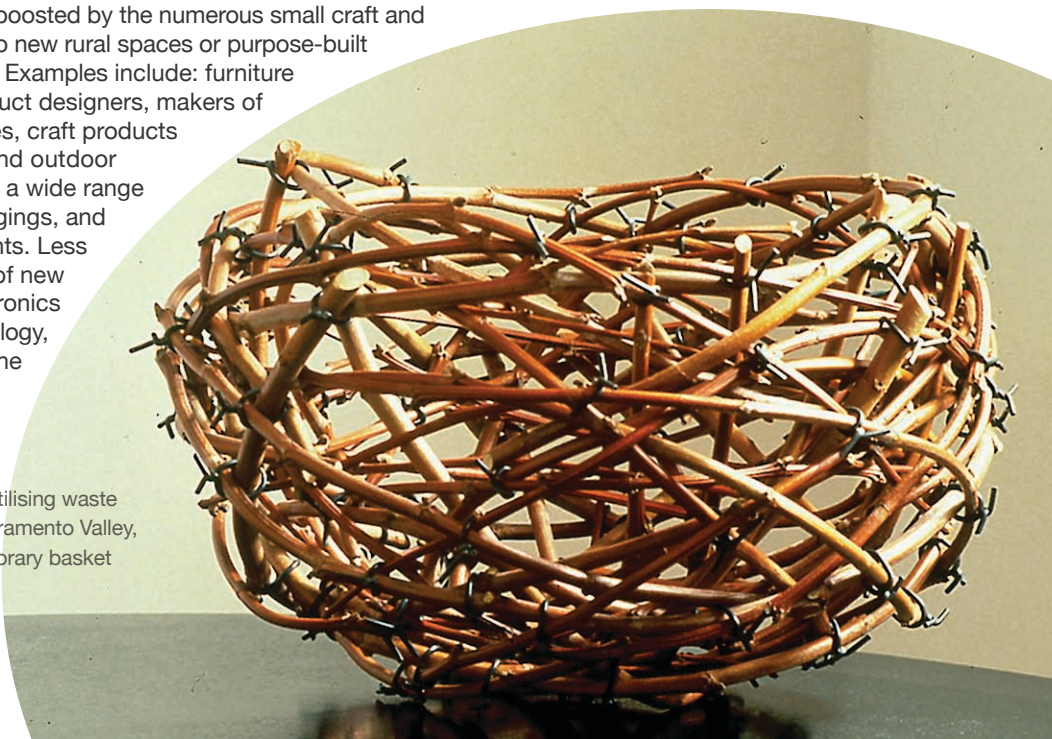
The creative rural economy is further boosted by the numerous small craft and design-based businesses locating into new rural spaces or purpose-built workspaces now becoming available. Examples include: furniture designers/makers, architectural product designers, makers of children's clothing, toys, digital games, craft products associated with horse riding, high-end outdoor recreation and sports wear, including a wide range of ceramics, glass, carpets, wall hangings, and ecclesiastical garments and ornaments. Less well documented, is the emergence of new crafts interfaces with the micro-electronics industry, pharmaceuticals, bio-technology, and other digital technologies; e.g. The Owl Project. www.owlproject.com

innovative contemporary crafts projects, utilising waste prunings from the almond orchards in Sacramento Valley, California, to produce high value contemporary basket forms. Artist Gyongy Laky

The contemporary rural crafts have a major role to play in sustaining the future creative rural economy. They are also well positioned to make an important contribution to the new policy discourses connecting culture and environmental sustainability



The i-Log project, exploring new technology interfaces with traditional rural crafts. The Owl Project
www.owlproject.com





Farming and fashion – new rural textiles and fibre arts

Another significant but, as yet, undocumented areas of designer /craft contribution to the rural creative economy are the high-end designer range of country clothing and fashionwear markets. Also textile designers, milliners, fibre artists, furnishing designers, and related craft/design marketing businesses. These, when taken along with the myriad of home-based, part time or amateur practitioners of textile art and crafts, dress-making and home knitting, would again suggest that the contribution made to the rural economy by these textile and fashion-based sectors is likely to be significant. Another growing area of innovation in rural textile design lies in the emerging new design interfaces linking, farming, new fibre crops, and fashion; including the processing of farm-grown hemp, flax, nettles, and leather and wool from animals, and in the production of a wide range of sustainable textiles, clothing, footwear, and fashion wear, pioneered by the Bio-Regional Group, and DEFRA 's FERA- Food and Environment Research Agency at York.

Jane Exley - The woolly rug company Cumbria
Fine Art rug design using locally sourced Herdwick sheep wools

Contemporary crafts in the creative rural economy.

Perhaps the most significant of these, and again an undocumented contribution to the creative rural economy, is that of the contemporary rural crafts. It is likely that this sector alone could - in time - grow to match or exceed the figures currently quoted above for the traditional rural crafts in the Collins report (2004). Certainly, it would be very interesting to conduct a similar scale study of the economic contribution of the contemporary rural crafts in this context. The significance of this particular craft contribution made to the creative rural economy could well prove to be something of a major revelation. In this context, the RCF has been lobbying for an independent study to be undertaken of the economic contribution provided by the contemporary crafts in rural areas, and to the creative rural economy

Economic potential of rural crafts and textiles

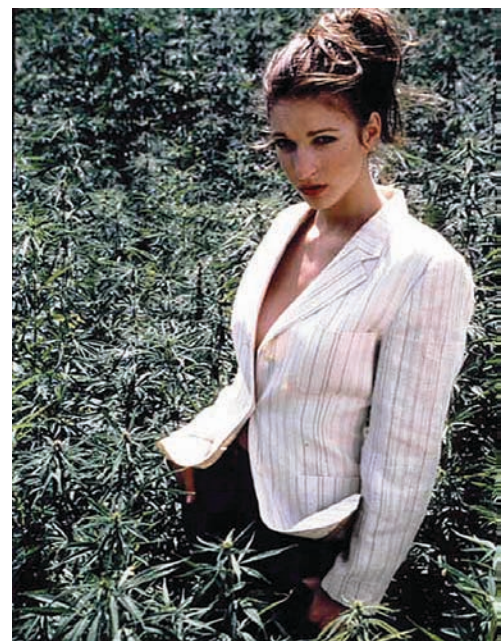
In brief, it is suggested that the contemporary rural craft and design sector, including related textiles, fashion, furnishings and experimental bio-technological craft/design products and 'smart' interactive clothing, will prove to be one of the key drivers of the future creative rural economy. In addition to enhancing and sustaining rural community creativity, cultural capital and social cohesion, the contemporary crafts and textiles generate other important employment opportunities for professional craftspeople and designers, and from both urban and rural backgrounds. The contemporary rural crafts are also well positioned to make a significant contribution to the emerging cultural discourses and strategic policy initiatives being proposed in support of the Government's agendas for environmental sustainability.

A dialogue with the Craft and Design Councils

The RCF would welcome a dialogue with the Craft and Design Councils, and representatives from the Fashion and Textile Industry, to discuss the possibilities of developing a New Rural Crafts/Textile Design for Sustainability R&D initiative. This could include proposals for a major national study of the contribution to the national creative economy by the contemporary rural crafts and textile design sector. The findings from his study could be presented at a supporting international conference, exhibition (and publication); 'Mapping a new role for contemporary craft and textile design in the post-agricultural economy'.



Harvesting hemp for textiles, The Bioregional Group



Fashion garment woven from farm grown hemp, trial scheme initiated by the Bioregional Group

New Rural Arts

5



Agnes Denes pioneer of Art and Agriculture projects in urban contexts.
'Wheatfield- a confrontation' Battery Park sculpture project Manhattan 1982

Rural collaborations with professional artists

The RCF has a long standing interest in supporting and working with urban and rural professional artists, and in securing new funding opportunities and resources for artists, designers, writers and craftspeople working and living in rural areas. The RCF is also supportive of artists, curators, researchers and other cultural practitioners interested in working collaboratively with farming and rural communities, and in developing new creative responses to rural community development, promoting biodiversity in the countryside, and agricultural reform (RDPE, etc.). The RCF committee includes representatives from leading national rural arts and media companies including the Rural Media Company, Hereford and the LITTORAL Arts Trust, Lancashire.

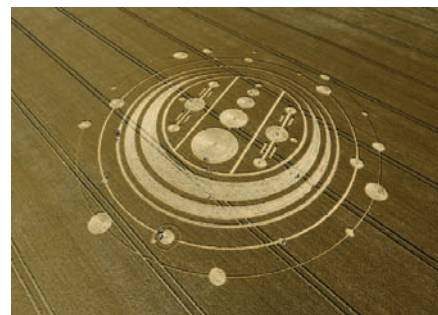
Artists on the land; successful collaborations with rural communities

Artists and rural communities would also benefit by having a dedicated rural arts development agency and support service, or a centre that could provide information and help with setting up future project partnerships. Many urban artists could also use more guidance and help on how to go about setting future collaborative projects in rural contexts. Similarly, rural communities could also use more help and advice regarding the selection of artists, and in structuring art projects and art commissions that are more suited to their particular needs, localities and creative aspirations.

What are the New Rural Arts?

The New Rural Arts is a general term used to describe a range of innovative art practices and curatorial strategies currently being improvised by artists interested in engaging with issues about rural development and agricultural change. Art and Agriculture is another term increasingly being used by artists and critics to denote long term art project work focuses more on farming and agricultural issues. So far these new art genres do not appear to be governed by a single aesthetic ideology, or set of curatorial and theoretical orthodoxies. They also seem to function best as an informal, open ended diversity of critical practices and curatorial tactics. However, it may be possible to obtain an overview of the likely future development of this work by grouping some of the critical orientations and attitudes currently evident within the genre. These include an interest in:

- (1) addressing a wide range of interdisciplinary and creative solutions to some of the core social, economic and environmental problems and issues currently confronting rural and farming communities;
- (2) working on long term collaborative projects with farmers and rural communities, and employing more 'immersive', as opposed to 'interventionist' art practices in pursuit of these ends;
- (3) a deepening of practitioner engagement in understanding and responding to some of the underlying ethical, aesthetic, critical and philosophical issues evident in agricultural, countryside and rural issues, and related public discourses;
- (4) achieving a closer alignment of individual art practices and arts development strategies with key policy agendas and initiatives relating to agricultural reform, the creative rural economy, and environmental sustainability
- (5) supporting the RCF's three main cultural responsibility campaigns, including the 'Beyond the Rural' proposals for the establishment of an urban rural coalition in support of a future cultural strategy for environmental sustainability;
- (6) a willingness (when necessary) to forgo purely art world careerist concerns, and the production of finite art works; i.e. 'art for arts sake' as the main motivations for critical and aesthetic engagement in rural contexts, and with rural communities.



Crop circles are another example of cultural uses of surplus farmland



Stan Herd, Artist specialising in giant field artworks using combinations of food plants

Art and Agriculture - the new rural arts

'Agriculture sits at the very heart of culture. It is vital to our human fertility, national identity and survival as a human species. Re-thinking the future of agriculture is also fundamentally a cultural task and responsibility'
Ian Hunter - Littoral Arts

Art and Agriculture - critical art practice in agricultural contexts

The outlines of an emergent 'Art and Agriculture' new rural arts practice tradition is also evident in the way in which artists are responding creatively to issues in agriculture and related farm diversification initiatives. Although partly urban in origin, other recent art genres such as ecological art, new genre public art, socially engaged art and relational art are increasingly being modified and deployed by artists and curators, in addressing some of the underlying or more intractable issues and problems now emerging in the agricultural sector.

The RCF has begun documenting this work and is engaging in dialogue with some of the pioneering artists and rural arts groups around the country and internationally, to try to establish a professional network and documentation initiative. The RCF regards these emergent new rural art genres as critical to the delivery of some of the key strands of its proposed rural cultural strategy, and hopes to encourage the Arts Council to recognise this work as an important new field of contemporary art practice, which will require further professional development and some agreed theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings.

Agriculture as a new site for cultural research and aesthetic discourse

Although not its main focus, the RCF is keen to encourage artists, arts researchers and cultural policy makers to take a new critical look at agriculture and rural development policy, from new creative and cultural perspectives. For too long, agriculture policy and the farming sector in general have been cut off, or inadvertently sidelined, from mainstream cultural critique and related cultural investment strategies. Reframing the discourse of agriculture as a new cultural undertaking and intellectual responsibility is a longer term objective of the RCF. Similarly, aspects of farming and agricultural policy can also, under certain circumstances, be described as 'cultural' in that they raise other important ethical, aesthetic, and philosophical questions and issues. This work also has important implications for future arts and cultural policy.

In the context of these, and the proposed Rural Cultural Strategy, the RCF is interested in pursuing several related areas of future research and development work. These include:

1. Curating in new challenging rural and agricultural contexts: exploring new urban rural cultural partnerships and interfaces;
2. Developing a new critical pedagogy and theoretical basis for Art and Agriculture and the new rural arts;
3. Growing the creative rural economy, providing new support for farmer creatives and future art farms projects;
4. Interventions in the policy sphere: connecting up future rural development, agriculture and cultural policy discourses;
5. Promoting an international network for artists and curators interested in agriculture and farming issues.



Kultivator - Marriage of Art and Agriculture international symposium, Kalmar Sweden July 2010



Many artists are interested in livestock culture and the impact of factory farming on animal welfare. Temple Grandin academic / sociologist



Keith Wilson - Sculptural instillation based on farm stockyard engineering and cattle management systems. Hawes cattle auction mart North Yorkshire 2006

Art and Agriculture - the new rural arts

"England must live upon herself through agriculture if ever she would return to a healthy condition of existence" John Ruskin

Farmer Creatives - the Art Farms success story

In addition to the innovative work by professional artists and designers going on in agricultural contexts, there is also a growing number of what might be termed; farmer creatives or artist farmers, and related art farm projects also active in the rural sector. This blurring of the line between farming and art and agriculture and culture is not new. In fact John Ruskin was an early exponent of the cultural importance of agriculture.

Artist Farmers/Farmer Artists

More recently a number of farmer artists projects have begun to emerge internationally. In Australia, farmer James Darling has represented Australia at number of leading international art exhibitions and Biennales. Elsewhere in the USA, artist Agnes Denes and the partnership of Helen and Newton Harrison have been pioneering agriculture as art projects. The LITTORAL Arts Trust is currently compiling a publication and exhibition to record and critically evaluate all these projects.

http://www.adelaidebiennial.com/cocoon/adelaidebiennial/darling_james.xml

<http://theharrisonstudio.net/>



The York corn maze 2009

Art Farms

In recent years, some 25 specialist Art Farms have been established on farms in the SW, Midlands and in the North. In basic terms, surplus farm land and farm buildings are converted and/or given over almost exclusively for artistic purposes or for us as artists' studios and workspaces.

<http://www.artfarmproject.co.uk/>

<http://www.brownsnscows.com/>



Corn Mazes and Crop Circles

Something of a new cultural phenomena in the rural context are the veritable explosion in the number of corn mazes (and related crop circle projects) now being developed on farms all over England and in Europe. By a rough count, it is estimated that there are currently about 200 corn maze and crop circle projects currently active this season in England alone. These too are generating significant new tourism activity in the countryside, as well as providing a valuable secondary income for individual farmers. A national scoping study and economic analysis of the contribution that these events are making to the creative rural economy would very worthwhile.

<http://www.yorkmaze.com/>

<http://www.temporarytemples.co.uk/imagelibrary/>



The Arts in Care Farming and Farming and Countryside Education

The National Care Farming network and FACE (RASE/ Farming and Countryside Education) are examples of other farming and rural support organisations who are also making use of the arts in promoting wider public understanding and engagement with farming culture, the countryside and food.

<http://www.face-online.org.uk/>



Artists as pioneer farmers; Portable Orchard: Survival Piece 1972-73

Installation with Harvesting and Feasting by artists Helen and Newton Harrison. Commissioned by the Gallery at California State University, Fullerton. The work was composed of twelve 4-foot in diameter hexagonal redwood boxes, three feet deep, planted with assorted citrus trees, topped by hexagonal redwood light boxes. Because of the loss of orchard and farm to ongoing suburban and industrial development and resulting smog in the area, the work was prophesied to be the last orange orchard in Orange County.

Future Research and Arts Development

6



Rural communities and artists make use of radio and advanced telecommunications in their research and documentation work - Chipping Rural Community radio project 2002

Future research programmes

New contexts for arts and cultural policy

The Rural Cultural Forum recognises that if rural communities are to achieve a degree of cultural equity and make a full contribution to the economic and cultural life of the nation, then they will need to keep abreast of all the new research and thinking currently informing policy-making on rural affairs, environmental sustainability, the arts and creative industries. The proposed programme of rural cultural policy research work (listed under) could well surface other interesting new approaches and issues in relation to future arts funding policy and art development work. Which could also, directly or indirectly, have an impact on future policy-making in the context of rural development, agricultural reform and environmental sustainability.

Cultural inclusion and community enfranchisement

Cultural policy, from a rural community perspective at least, seems still to be mostly focused on urban regeneration and urban cultural agendas. It is partly for this reason that the RCF is interested in developing more community accessible, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable approaches to cultural policy making and arts development work in the future. Including the creation of alternative policy fora and interfaces whereby groups and communities, who might feel marginalised - whether by adverse geographical, economic, or other culturally perceived disadvantages, would be able to have a voice and say in how future cultural funding and arts resources are being allocated in their name.

1 *Enfranchising marginal rural and other cultural constituencies*

In particular, the RCF wishes to encourage and support new arts policy research aimed at addressing some of the cultural aspirations, creative capital/potential, and artistic needs of various hitherto overlooked communities and constituencies, that are currently not seemingly being adequately addressed. In the rural context these include; elders, young people and children in rural areas, rural women, rural incomers and people with disabilities, migrant rural workers, BME and low income communities, and also the many Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities also based in rural areas. The importance of ongoing research and cultural investment work with the fishing port communities and hill farming communities is highlighted elsewhere in this report.

2 *Rural Cultural Observatory: anticipating future cultural and rural policy alignments*

An essential part of any NGO campaign or independent cultural strategy is intelligence-gathering and keeping up-to-date with current research on rural issues. This includes work led by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, rural sociology associations, Carnegie UK Trust, Rural Services Network, ACRE, The Commission for Rural Communities, The Rural Health Forum, DEFRA, and the Plunkett Foundation, among others. It is also vital for the RCF to keep abreast of policy initiatives and research regarding future rural development and agricultural reform (DEFRA/RDPE), community sustainability (DCLG/CRC), environmental sustainability (DEFRA/DECC), the Creative Economy and culture-led regeneration (DCMS, BERR), and providing wider rural access to the arts/Arts for All (Arts Council England, National Arts Strategy).

3 *Future RCF arts development work and support for new rural arts practitioners*

Research work is also needed to identify future priorities for RCF exhibitions, conferences, publications and other arts events. These include: promoting innovative arts projects in the context of rural health initiatives, a national rural youth arts and cultural investment programme, a digital rural media and the economy investment programme, and a new rural crafts and sustainability initiative. Other research is required to enable the RCF to develop partnerships and collaborations with professional artists, curators and the urban art world. These research areas are outlined in more detail in section 6 'New Rural Arts'.

4 *Establishment of an RCF cultural networking and information support service*

The RCF also needs to establish a formal research and information network for artists and rural communities. This could probably be achieved via an on-line news digest and through publication of a Rural Cultures bulletin, at monthly intervals. There are numerous other arts, academic and cultural sector electronic news boards that would take such information, such as INTUTE, ACE, Saatchi Arts, Art Education, ACORN/IACCA, About Arts, Critical Network.

References Acknowledgements

7

References and Reports:

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