

# Countryside Communities

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Five Key Messages about Countryside Communities:

1. **So far, Community Fund has awarded £645 million to projects that benefit rural communities (and counting...!)**
2. **This represents 28 per cent of our funding. Over 25 per cent of the population lives in rural areas.**
3. **There are still some pockets that are doing less well from Community Fund – hence the eight areas being targeted with £16.2 million. This is on top of the rural areas already targeted through fair share.**
4. **Community Fund and the Countryside Agency will be working together in the eight areas to build the capacity of rural communities to access our funding.**
5. **We aim to share lessons and partnership work beyond the eight areas – and Community Fund has earmarked £2.2 million in strategic grants to make this happen.**

### 1. **What is ‘Countryside Communities’ and what are the aims of the initiative?**

Countryside Communities aims to ensure that England’s rural communities receive their fair share of funding.

Community Fund and the Countryside Agency will work together at national and local levels to maximise funding opportunities for deprived rural areas, which have not had their fair share of Community Fund lottery funding. We will aim to build the capacity of rural communities to access lottery and other funding and to make a long-term difference in those communities.

Community Fund and the Countryside Agency are delivering Countryside Communities from within their existing resources and within their overall programmes, stated aims and priorities.

The activities specifically associated with Countryside Communities will be outreach and development-focused, with the aim of increasing successful applications in Countryside Communities areas. Normal grant eligibility criteria will apply.

This initiative is in addition to the commitments to rural areas included in the joint Community Fund / New Opportunities Fund **fair share** scheme

and to the rural areas in the 100 most deprived in England being targeted by Community Fund alone.

**2. What is the Countryside Agency?**

The Countryside Agency is the statutory body working to conserve and enhance the countryside, promote social equity and economic opportunity for the people who live there and help everyone, wherever they live, to enjoy this national asset.

**3. Why is the Countryside Agency involved in the Countryside Communities initiative?**

The Countryside Communities initiative reflects the Countryside Agency's aim to empower and enable rural communities so that they can influence the decisions that affect their daily life and take action to meet local need. So the Countryside Agency supports the Countryside Communities initiative and is working alongside the Community Fund to provide expertise and resources to ensure the initiative is targeted to meet the needs of people living in deprived rural areas.

**4. What benefits will it bring?**

Over a quarter of the population of England live in rural areas. Three million of those suffer poverty and low income. While deprivation and poverty are more usually associated with inner estates it is also a reality of rural life. Unemployment, low income, inadequate housing and local amenities, lack of access to education and training opportunities and limited services and public transport all affect rural areas, often outweighing the benefits of living in a rural community.

Throughout the five-year life span of this initiative we will be advising voluntary groups and other organisations in rural areas on how they should go about applying for grants to fund their projects from a variety of different sources and giving them every help and encouragement. This could be for a village playgroup, a rural dial-a-ride service or keep-fit sessions for older people in the village hall.

**5. What has been achieved so far in rural areas?**

Since the Community Fund began giving grants in 1995, it has awarded more than £645 million in grants for projects in rural areas throughout the UK. This represents 28 per cent of its total funding, which is more than the percentage of the total UK population that live in rural areas (25 per cent).

Among the rural projects the Community Fund has supported so far are schemes to encourage volunteering, village halls and neighbourhood meeting places, community transport and mobility schemes, support and counselling services for vulnerable groups, community enterprises, day-

care provision and drop-in centres, care centres for terminally ill people and food and fuel-poverty initiatives.

The Countryside Agency runs a wide variety of grants schemes. For example it has given over £14 million in the last year to rural communities, through its Vital Villages scheme, to help improve local services and plan for the future.

**6. Is the Countryside Communities UK-wide?**

No, it is only operating in eight rural areas within England.

**7. Why does the scheme not operate in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland?**

**Scotland**

This initiative is about targeting deprived rural areas that have not had their 'fair share' of lottery funding. This is not really a problem in Scotland as rural areas have done very well. We have awarded more than £95m to rural areas in Scotland and have also put as much as £30m into village halls, mostly in rural areas.

Nevertheless it is still a priority for us to fund projects to help disadvantaged people in rural areas. South Ayrshire, a rural area that has not done so well from lottery funding, is a **fair share** area for us.

We also have a priority to fund projects that assist people in areas of rural decline by funding projects that help mainstream access to services, take action to prevent problems or test new ideas.

We continue to work with partners in rural areas to encourage quality applications. We have a partnership agreement with local authorities and councils for voluntary service in every local authority. We also work closely with Highlands and Island Enterprise and the local enterprise councils in those areas.

However as our budget is declining we must focus our grants on projects that will make a long term difference to disadvantaged people and so for example we are unlikely to fund as many large grants for halls as we have done in the past.

**Wales**

The Wales Committee carefully considered the option to join the Countryside Communities initiative. The Committee is very aware of the disadvantage that exists in rural Wales and is reminded of this in the number and nature of applications we receive.

Our track record shows that we have invested over £59 million of funding into projects benefiting people in rural areas and on the whole they have received more per head of population than people in urban areas. Our

Strategic Priorities will continue to encourage applications that address isolation, meeting the needs of low income communities and other features of rural disadvantage. It was therefore decided by the Wales Committee not to join the initiative but to monitor its progress and keep an overview on the performance of rural areas in Wales.

### **Northern Ireland**

The office for Northern Ireland analyses and maps its grant giving on an annual basis. Following this exercise last year (2001), it was decided to analyse not only at local authority but also down to ward level. 118 wards were identified which are current strategic priority wards, the majority of which are in rural areas. We have awarded more than £51 million to rural areas in Northern Ireland.

Fair Share - though relatively small in Northern Ireland - also is mainly a rural program. In addition, a major award was given to the Rural Community Network, who is the umbrella body for all rural networks working with 600 local groups in rural areas across Northern Ireland.

The Countryside Agency only operates in England.

## **8. How have you selected the rural areas?**

The Community Fund and the Countryside Agency used data on deprivation and Community Fund past awards to select eight deprived rural districts in England that were not already selected under the existing fair share initiative.

The list of areas identified is not the eight poorest areas, nor is it the eight areas with the lowest uptake of lottery funds – but the eight areas that combine *both* criteria.

## **9. How much will my area get?**

The eligible areas are in the South East, South West, East Midlands and Eastern areas of England.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Local Authority District</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Eastern	King's Lynn and West Norfolk	£1,889,177
Eastern	Fenland	£1,248,034
Eastern	North Norfolk	£1,989,036
East Midlands	Boston	£995,619
East Midlands	West Lindsey	£1,337,908
South East	Shepway	£2,006,074
South East	Dover	£2,454,519
South West	Sedgemoor	£2,056,864
England-wide (Strategic Grants)		£2,241,798
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£16,219,029</b>

**10. Did you consult anyone in selecting the areas?**

We have consulted the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and discussed the methodology with the Regional Co-ordination Unit, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Active Community Unit.

**11. How have you decided whether areas were deprived?**

The Countryside Communities areas are just part of Community Fund's commitment to tackling deprivation in rural areas across England.

To identify the areas on which to target our efforts, we use a robust methodology, which combines data on disadvantage and lottery funding per head. We use the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, a standard measure used by the Government and Local Authorities, to determine the levels of deprivation of areas. This approach is recommended by the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and provides the most up-to-date measure.

Under the joint **fair share** initiative with NOF, Community Fund has already targeted the 100 most deprived districts that have received less than the median amount of funding per head from Community Fund. There are nine rural districts included in the 100 most deprived, although several have already had their 'fair share' from Community Fund. We are therefore already committed to awarding over £5 million to the following rural areas by March 2005 (Countryside Communities is in addition to these):

Region	Local Authority District	fair share area?	Amount
Eastern	Waveney	Yes	£1,546,000
Eastern	Tendring	Yes	£691,000
East Midlands	East Lindsey		£1,098,000
North West	Ellesmere Port and Neston	Yes	£766,000
North West	Lancaster		£3,000
South East	Thanet	Yes	£1,325,000
	<b>Total</b>		<b>£5,429,000</b>

The amounts to be awarded are the amounts it will take to bring each area up to a projected median per head over the period of **fair share**.

On top of this, Countryside Communities will target another eight areas, those mentioned in question 10. The methodology for identifying them was similar to the fair share areas and was agreed by Community Fund and the Countryside Agency. In this case, we will specifically be targeting the rural parts of the districts identified.

As well as the eight named areas, Community Fund is also committing £2.2 million to strategic initiatives, such as information and idea sharing across rural areas in England. The total amount to be committed to Countryside Communities is therefore £16,219,029, which is £10 million more than we would otherwise have spent, based on past patterns.

**12. Why are some of the rural areas selected less deprived than others not selected?**

Some of the most deprived rural areas have received high levels of Lottery funding already and so are not included in Countryside Communities.

The Countryside Communities areas are in addition to the commitments to rural areas in the fair share initiative, run jointly between Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund, and to the areas in the 100 most deprived in England being targeted by Community Fund alone.

In total, Community Fund will be targeting over £21 million to 14 rural areas in England, which have had less than their fair share of Lottery funding.

**13. Why did you use the IMD? Its been criticised for not adequately reflecting rural deprivation.**

The Index of Multiple Deprivation is the most widely used deprivation measure. It has been used by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit to prioritise its resources at the 88 most deprived districts in England – 5 of these are rural. Work is going to ensure this measure of deprivation is appropriate for rural, as well as urban areas and the Countryside Agency is on the steering group looking at how the IMD can be revised to better reflect rural deprivation.

**14. Doesn't this mean that you are failing to tackle the areas of rural disadvantage in a way that accurately reflects the position across England?**

This initiative is tackling disadvantage *and* low levels of lottery funding in rural areas. A model that just took the most disadvantaged areas into account would result in a different list of areas.

**15. Is there a timescale for Countryside Communities?**

Yes, the initiative will run over five years, to March 2007.

**16. What will you fund?**

Throughout the five-year life span of this initiative we will be advising voluntary groups and other organisations in rural areas on how they should go about applying for grants to fund their projects and giving them every help and encouragement. This could be for a village playgroup, a rural dial-a-ride service or keep-fit sessions for the elderly in the village hall.

**17. What won't you fund?**

A very wide range of projects could be funded, but funding will still be determined by the quality of applications received.

**18. What about Foot and Mouth?**

This initiative is all about a 'fair share' for the countryside rather than a specific response to the devastating effects of the Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001. While the effect on the rural economy of Foot and Mouth has been well documented, there are other ongoing, less dramatic deprivations affecting life in the countryside and it is these deprivations that Countryside Communities wants to tackle.

**19. And what about village halls? I've heard money for village halls is being cut.**

Since 1995, the Community Fund has awarded more than £109 million for the building, extension and improvement of 2,271 village halls. Although our income is in decline the level of funding to village halls remains consistent at about seven per cent. We will continue to encourage applications from village halls, particularly those in the rural areas being targeted by the Countryside Communities and **fair share** initiatives. However, we do not normally award grants over £300,000 and applicants wishing to apply for a Village Hall project should contact their local Community Fund office to discuss their project before completing an application form.

**20. How will you deliver the initiative?**

We will take account of local needs in each area in deciding how best to deliver the initiative on the ground. Local delivery plans will be drawn up by the Community Fund and Countryside Agency staff in each identified area.

**21. Where do the Community Fund resources come from for the initiative?**

The £16.2m available over five years will come from the Community Fund's anticipated income. This is £10m more than the areas would have received based on past patterns.

**22. Does that mean there will be less money available for the Community Fund's existing programmes?**

No. The Community Fund had already planned to allocate some of its resources over the next five years to certain priority geographical areas, as outlined in its Strategic Plan for 2002 to 2007.

**23. And what about the Countryside Agency resources for the initiative?**

The Countryside Agency is providing strategic advice and support nationally as well as all important local support through our regional offices. This support will include working with Community Fund colleagues to identify groups and projects that could benefit from Countryside Communities funding, providing other funding, if appropriate, and drawing up and implementing a local delivery plan.

**24. How are the Community Fund and the Countryside Agency working together?**

A joint agreement has been drawn up between the two organizations. We have also established a joint Steering Group to oversee the delivery of the scheme. Regional staff will also be working together to deliver the initiative.

**25. Will there be another Countryside Communities initiative after this?**

At this stage, the initiative is to run in eight areas over five years until the end of March 2007. We will evaluate its impact before arriving at any decision.

**26. There is £3.5 billion in the National Lottery Distribution Fund. Why did you not put more money into Countryside Communities?**

The £3.5 billion represents the allocations held by all the Lottery distributors. The Community Fund's balance at October 2002 was £323 million, all of which is already committed to grants that have been approved (in fact our future commitments stand at over £500 million, so we are drawing on our future income to meet them). We cannot draw on allocations held by other distributors.

Over the next two to three years the amount we have in the NLDF for the Community Fund will reduce as we anticipate more use of income still to be received. For the most part we pay out grants quarterly in advance, though small sums up to £10,000 can be paid in one go. We operate to the usual rules of accountability for the use of public funds and in those terms cannot pay out grants fully in advance. For example, we need to have evidence that a building project is proceeding satisfactorily and release payment according to need.

The important thing about Countryside Communities is that the communities who are eligible will not have to *compete* with one another for funding. There has always been money available for these areas but they have had difficulty drawing down as much lottery funding as they could have. So the amount of money put in is not the issue – more money wouldn't necessarily solve the problem – it's about making the kind of grants that make communities stronger and in the longer term enabling them to attract a whole range of funding to meet their needs.

**27. What support does the Countryside Agency have in terms of funding for rural communities?**



The Countryside Agency provides a variety of support for rural communities – principally:

- Vital Village programme – provides parish plan grants (up to £5,000) to fund the creation of village action plans, community services grants (between £500 and £25,000) to help communities maintain and introduce services which are local priorities, parish transport grants (up to £10,000) to support small scale local transport projects and Rural Transport Partnership grants (up to £25,000) which can be used by Rural Transport Partnerships to implement larger-scale transport projects.
- Market towns programme – provides a tool kit, containing information on doing a health check to measure the health of a market town and details of how to convert this into an action plan to raise funding and address a town's problems, along with advice on community participation, funding for projects, training, transport and business support.

**28. How successful are the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages and Market Towns programmes?**

The Countryside Agency feel that in their first year or so of operating these two schemes have been extremely successful in providing much needed funding for rural communities and empowering them to identify and meet their own needs.

In its first year the Vital Villages initiative awarded over £14 million, with one in ten rural communities benefiting (1,400 projects). Since the scheme started in May 2001 one in five market towns have or are undertaking health checks (190) towns - so far 120 of these towns have converted them into action plans.

**29. What are the Countryside Agency's views on the grant of £340,000 that the Community Fund gave to the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns?**

This is not an issue for the Countryside Agency to comment on.

**30. There has recently been some speculation in the media that the Countryside Agency is going to be closed down or have its budgets significantly cut. Is this the case?**

This is not the case, contrary to recent press reports. It has now been confirmed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the Agency's budget will increase year-on-year next year and the Agency or its work is not under threat.