



## Changing Communities

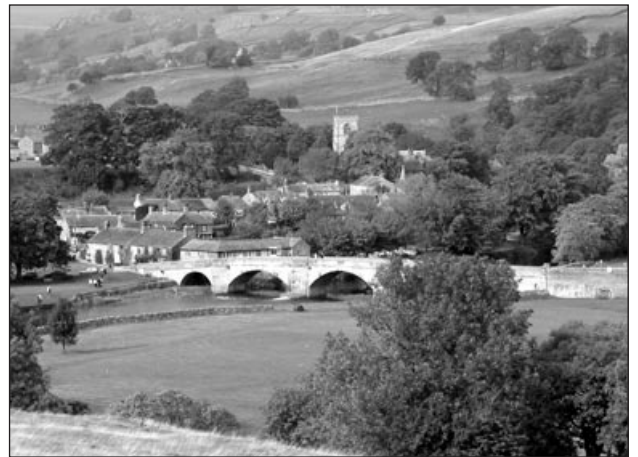
### testing times

No matter where we live, we all want the same basic things in our communities, among them: stable employment; secure and affordable homes; adequate local services. While the 20,000 people living in the Yorkshire Dales National Park are no exception, many Dales residents struggle to meet these basic needs locally. In some cases, the situation is extreme and can truly be described as one of "social exclusion".

The Cabinet Office (2000) define social exclusion as:

"... a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown".

Social exclusion is a prominent driver of demographic change in the Dales. Those affected tend to move away, to be replaced often by older more affluent people, more able to afford to live in the area. While it's true that many newcomers make valuable contributions to local communities, often showing active interests in local culture and the environment, they can create demands for services, which accelerate change. As newcomers they may even feel excluded themselves. With these changes in population, come real changes in the character of the Dales community.



*The Rural Idyll? Burnsall, Wharfedale. (Conroy & Company)*

### HIDDEN HARDSHIP

Many people find it hard to believe that social exclusion exists among the green and picturesque surroundings of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, believing this to be a problem confined to urban areas. Terms such as "affluent" and "self sufficient" are often used to describe rural communities, painting a somewhat romantic picture of rural life – the 'rural idyll' – which is a far cry from present day reality for growing numbers of people. Even those who accept that social exclusion exists in the countryside may have trouble identifying it:

- Social exclusion in rural areas often goes undeclared as traditional attitudes, like being self-sufficient, can also discourage those involved from seeking outside help, e.g. registering for state benefits.
- General trends in rural areas, e.g. income levels, often hide severe inequalities as the economically disadvantaged live side by side with the more affluent - in contrast to urban areas where the excluded tend to be concentrated in groups and so more visible.
- In urban areas unemployment is an important aspect of social exclusion, whereas in rural areas job problems relate more to low pay and seasonality of employment.

Previous attempts to characterise rural communities have not acknowledged these differences and so have failed to identify the true levels of existing hardship. Close consideration of issues relating to, for example, employment, housing and service provision within Dales communities illustrates these difficulties more clearly.



*"Hidden hardship?". Grinton village hall. (YDNPA)*

**FAILING FACILITIES**

Most of us take easy access to services such as GP surgeries, post offices, banks, shops and public transport, for granted. In the Dales however, the overall picture of service provision is one of decline and centralization. People often struggle to find these basic amenities locally.

In 2000, DETR measured every ward (8,414) in England on a scale of most deprived to least deprived. Findings for the YDNP against geographical access to services such as shops, banks and post offices, show that:

- All but three wards in the Park (Settle, Emsay-with-Eastby and Gargrave) are among the 25% most deprived in England.
- 11 (over 50%) wards in the Park are ranked among the worst 5% in England.
- The wards of Aysgarth and Grinton & Upper Swaledale are ranked, respectively, the 13th and 14th most deprived wards in the country.

Source: *Indices of Deprivation 2000, DETR*

The lack of public transport facilities in the often isolated rural communities of the Dales is a particular problem. It can leave people stranded, without access to amenities or jobs locally, and forced to resort to car ownership or other costly means of getting around.

- Only 10 settlements in the YDNP have an hourly bus service running from Monday to Friday.

Source: *The State of the Park Report 2001, YDNPA.*

Recently, some communities have taken advantage of the Parish Transport Grant (Countryside Agency) to develop small-scale transport projects, eg car clubs, car share and "dial-a-ride" schemes.

**VULNERABLE VOCATIONS**

Unemployment rates are low in the Dales. In 2002 a mere 1% of the local population (3% in England & Wales), were registered unemployed. This appears to paint a very rosy picture of the local economy. Consideration of agricultural employment in the Dales tells a very different story.

More than any other activity, farming has defined rural life in the Dales, yet:

- UK agriculture is in crisis, accounting for less than 0.75% of the total UK economy (down by half in the last ten years).
- Foot & Mouth Disease in 2001 has had a devastating impact on the national farming community; recent estimates suggest industry net losses of £600 million.

Source: *The State of the Countryside Report 2002, The Countryside Agency*

- Agricultural employment in the Yorkshire Dales is increasingly part-time & seasonal:

Agricultural Workforce / Year	1986	1996	% Change 86-96
Full-time Workforce	1,745	1,548	- 11.3%
Part-time Workforce	435	542	+ 24.6%
Seasonal or Casual	273	298	+ 9.2%

Source: *Census for Agriculture 1986 -1996, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) now DEFRA*

- Farm incomes are declining: between 1995 and 2000 UK farm incomes fell by around 60%.

Source: *Our Countryside Our Future (2000), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).*



*Catering for jobs in tourism – sustainable employment? (YDNPA)*

Dales communities are heavily dependent on employment within agriculture and increasingly on tourism, leaving them vulnerable to changes within these industries. Lack of choice in the job market, with such a narrow economic base, is potentially more socially exclusive than unemployment. Furthermore, employment in these sectors tends to be seasonal and low paid.



*Maintaining traditional farming – can farmers survive? (YDNPA)*

## HIGH-PRICED HOUSING

In many urban areas, poor quality housing is a defining feature of social exclusion. In Dales communities, housing problems relate more to an absence of affordable accommodation.

- 1% of Dales housing is provided by Housing Associations
- 8% of Dales housing is provided by Local Authorities

The National Park is a beautiful place to live, attracting many people from outside, often searching for retirement and holiday homes. Increasingly intense competition for the limited supply of housing, has pushed property prices beyond the reach of many earning a living in the area. This has forced many locals to leave and seek affordable accommodation elsewhere.

- In 2002, average house prices within the Yorkshire Dales National Park were 62% greater than in 1998:

Year	Average House Price
1998	£110,395
2000	£152,431
2002	£177,628

*Average House Prices within the YDNP 1998-2002 (YDNPA)*

In 2002, houses within the Yorkshire Dales National Park were on average:

- over 2.5 times more expensive than the Yorkshire and Humber region
- over 85% more costly than houses in the UK as a whole.

Region	Average House Price in 2002
Yorkshire Dales National Park	£177,628
Yorkshire and Humber Region	£70,166
United Kingdom	£95,356

*2002 Average House Price by Region*

*Source: House Price Survey 2002, YDNPA.*

Expensive houses and low incomes mean that many locals are priced out of the property market. Most mortgage providers will lend buyers up to three times their annual income when purchasing a house. This will not suffice within the National Park, as the ratio of average house prices to average household income is much higher. In 2000:

- average price of a semi-detached house within the park was £115,172.
- The average farm manager earned £21,946.08 per year (5:1 ratio).
- The average agricultural worker earned £15,508.48 per year (7:1 ratio).

*Source: The State of the Park Report 2001. (YDNPA).*

Lack of affordable housing is a crucial element of demographic change in the area. Developing affordable housing in the remote, sparsely populated areas of the National Park presents particular problems. Housing Associations have experienced difficulties in locating suitable sites at a sufficiently low price in areas where a need for affordable housing has been identified. Between 1988 to 1998 there were 11 developments of affordable housing in the National Park. All of these have all been small-scale, reflecting the small populations of Dales communities. This small size means that housing associations have little assurance of continued longer-term local demand for their properties. Smaller developments usually mean higher construction costs per unit.

## POPULATION PROBLEMS

Persistent problems in employment, housing and service provision within Dales communities often leave those affected with little choice but to move elsewhere. The first people affected are less affluent groups, especially young people, women (lone parents and those with young children) and people with disabilities. Those who replace them are generally prosperous and often ageing, looking to the Dales for holiday homes or retirement property.

- Census figures over the last 3 decades, clearly show a decrease in under-24 year olds and an increase in over 60's.
- 18% of the 9,400 dwellings in the Dales are second or holiday homes.

*Source: The State of the Park Report, 2000. YDNPA.*

Education is a further example, the fact that GCSE and A-Level standards in the Dales are often higher than national averages represents a potential source of skilled labour. Lack of local higher education and employment opportunities, means that many young people in the Dales leave the area to take up their studies and work elsewhere, a valuable resource is lost.



*Silver Street, Reeth - a sustainable local economy? (YDNPA)*



*Affordable housing scheme, Kettlewell. (YDNPA)*

## ERADICATING EXCLUSION?

Tackling social exclusion in Dales communities is by no means straightforward. The unique qualities of the area, the very reason for its National Park status, can have both positive and negative influences on the lives of residents:

- These qualities, which make the Dales such a desired place to live, themselves act as barriers to fully inclusive communities: a fiercely competitive property market is almost a given in such a desirable area.
- To some extent, social exclusion 'comes with the territory': service provision may well always be limited in small, secluded communities.

Combating social exclusion locally must focus on the positive, so that communities are stronger for being rooted in the Dales. Capitalizing on business potential in tourism, agriculture and the arts and crafts - based on the environmental and cultural strengths of the area - may help revive a flagging economy. Likewise, drawing on resourcefulness and resilience built up over centuries, may aid communities in devising innovative solutions to problems of service provision and developing new ways of co-operative and collaborative working.

Many of those who suffer the most from social exclusion can often lack the confidence and skills to participate in their community and address their own problems. The North Yorkshire Forum for Voluntary Organisations is tackling this problem by coordinating training courses in 'community capacity building' that will be delivered by the Yorkshire Rural Community Council and other agencies.

Whilst embracing their roots, Dales communities must also be forward thinking if they are to avoid becoming relics of the past. With the rise of modern information technology, rural communities needn't be shackled by physical isolation, they can now market products worldwide. ICT may also help in solving some of the service provision and economic problems associated with remoteness - it is now possible to undertake a wide range of web-based further education courses for example and to develop web-based markets for local produce.

Most importantly, Dales communities will not be left to deal with these issues alone. Shaping the future must involve organisations at every level from national to local:

- The government position is outlined in, "Our countryside: The future. A Fair Deal for Rural England", DEFRA, 2000
- The national position is developed by the Countryside Agency through "The State of the Countryside Report 2002"
- The Regional Development Agencies support and extend the work of North Yorkshire and Cumbria County Councils and the District Councils, at strategic and operational levels.
- The "State of the Park Report", YDNPA, outlines the current position of the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- "The National Park Management Plan" (YDNPA, 2000) identifies broad objectives for management of the whole Park, relating to a huge range of organisations. These objectives are being refined by the development of Area Actions, from local consultations throughout the National Park.



Wharfedale, classic Dales landscape – fit for the future? (YDNPA)

## FAVOURABLE FUTURE?

It's important to appreciate that if the traditional way of life in the Dales disappears, we'll all be affected directly to some degree. Dales communities have a very distinctive culture, reflected in a strong sense of place and continuity with the past. The demise of traditional Dales communities would be a great loss to national cultural diversity.

The Yorkshire Dales is a cultural landscape. This landscape is the product of centuries of relationship between local people and the land, in which scenery and society have become inextricably linked. Today we see a landscape typified by dry stone walls, meadows and pastures, scattered farmhouses and field barns and traditional buildings - one clearly influenced by traditional agricultural lifestyles. This connection between lifestyle and landscape predicts that the issues which threaten traditional communities, also threaten the very character of our treasured countryside. It is this very countryside, which is enjoyed by millions of visitors each year and on which much of the local economy depends so heavily.

"Changing communities" almost certainly mean a changing landscape. Testing times lie ahead for Dales communities - and for the very nature of the National Park itself.

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