

# MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AT THE RURAL URBAN FRINGE

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

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Hello and welcome to the second newsletter for the Managing Environmental Change at the Rural Urban Fringe (RUF) project.

Since our last newsletter the project team has been encouraging discussion of key themes for the RUF and disseminating project findings through the hosting of workshops, presentations and publications. This edition provides the latest project news.

Don't forget, to view all of the papers associated with the project please visit the project website: [www.bcu.ac.uk/research/-centres-of-excellence/centre-for-environment-and-society/projects/relu](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/-centres-of-excellence/centre-for-environment-and-society/projects/relu) or join us on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/#!/reluruf>.

## A note from the Principal Investigator

Time flies when you are working on the fringe. The RUF crosses many boundaries and I think it is important to reflect on how important, exciting and challenging transdisciplinary research is. The RUF arguably represents the dominant space of the 21st Century, yet this space where countryside meets town has a limited knowledge and evidence base and is characterised by ad-hoc and reactive planning within an urban-centric lens. Our project seeks to develop better lenses to maximise the environmental opportunities in the RUF, thereby improving the strategic planning process.



The project is funded by the Relu<sup>1</sup> initiative which is a consortium of BBSRC<sup>2</sup>, ESRC<sup>3</sup>, EPSRC<sup>4</sup> and NERC<sup>5</sup> together with support from LWEC<sup>6</sup>.

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

# A NOTE FROM THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR



## *Why a transdisciplinary approach?*

The RUF provides a valued yet 'messy' opportunity space involving many different landuses and services. To unpack it requires us to cross disciplinary, professional and sectoral boundaries within the research team and in constructing our conceptual approach. Uniquely, we view the RUF through the convergence of spatial planning and ecosystem services ideas.

## *Novel methodology*

This project champions an academic-policy-practice partnership approach for the design, implementation and evaluation of research; going beyond traditional academic-stakeholder engagement models. This has provided the opportunity to communicate across boundaries, stimulate social learning outcomes and enhance existing or create new networks to improve our evidence base and understanding of the RUF. The method has important applications for more integrated and innovative research addressing 'messy' public policy problems so we focus on the process and outcomes here.

To date, team members produced a reflective paper on spatial planning and/or the ecosystem approach with a particular focus on ecosystem services. These experiences, insights and comments were embedded into a wider report/literature review from which four key themes were identified and consequently prioritized for this research project: (1) Integrating Spatial Planning and Ecosystem Services; (2) Green Infrastructure Planning; (3) Contested Values and Decision-making; (4) Long-termism. These themes are now applied to the RUF via a policy brief series to inform and guide a range of policy, practice and community audiences. The policy briefs are informed by workshops and

case studies conducted and analysed as part of this research. This exciting partnership approach shows what can be achieved through fostering and building networks of information exchange and collaborative working. The expertise and co-production of knowledge brought together here involving different sectors would have been impossible within conventional research processes.

Further information and photos from the workshops can be seen on page 5.

## *Case studies*

Two RUF case studies were selected based on research team capacities and differences in scale, focus and context and associated insights to be gained and lessons learnt. Peterborough (town scale) builds on 20 years consultancy experience of two team members in the evolution of the RUF, whilst North Worcester (landscape scale), involving five team members, assesses how the countryside management approach pursued through the 1980s and the current green infrastructure approaches have worked. Both studies use public and professional visioning to augment the team's experience and existing evidence base. In both cases we are privy to information and access that rarely occurs within conventional research approaches over such a short time.

The research problems are shared, understood and managed through ongoing active participation and debate, giving a sense of direction and purpose that is both refreshing and exciting. This model is about working outside established comfort zones with collective problem solving, finite resources (time and cost) and developing pragmatic strategies that effectively draw on the team's skills, networks and ideas, leading to outputs which maximise impact across academic and policy communities.



# Project Team Update

We are delighted to welcome Claudia, Peter and Nicki to the BCU project team.

## Claudia Carter



With moving job from Forest Research to Birmingham City University, Claudia's role within the RUF-project has also somewhat changed. As before her expertise and core of work centres around environmental governance and

management, coming from an interdisciplinary research background and often working on projects looking into strengthening research-policy-practice links. New project tasks include the editing of the Relu-RUF policy brief series, building on my past experience in producing similar style research/project outputs; several of them are in fact relevant to the themes and concerns of this Relu-RUF project (see [www.clivespash.org/eve/publ.html#PRB](http://www.clivespash.org/eve/publ.html#PRB); [www.macaulay.ac.uk/economics/research/SERPpb2.pdf](http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/economics/research/SERPpb2.pdf)).

## Peter Larkham



Peter's background is entirely urban both as an academic specialist in urban form and history, and being born and bred in Wolverhampton. He has researched and published extensively on urban conservation, and most recently on the

replanning of British cities after wartime bombing. He has also worked with local community groups including civic and historical societies. His contribution to Relu is both in terms of writing experience but also in his historical interests, having helped with the Institutional Memory workshop in March.

## Nicki Schiessel



Nicki joined BCU in January from the University of Sheffield, where she worked on her PhD on the implications of changing perceptions and valuations of river services in planning for urban waterway corridors. Prior to that she worked as an environmental planning consultant with Atkins Planning, Landscape & Heritage in Birmingham,

predominantly involved in the social aspects of EIA and SEA. Nicki is contributing to the production of the Values and Decision-Making and the Spatial Planning and Ecosystem Services policy briefs.

## The Natural Environment White Paper

Members of the Relu-RUF project, Alister Scott and Mark Reed, contributed towards a report that helped shape the Government's recent White Paper on the Natural Environment. Commissioned by DEFRA. The report on *Barriers and Opportunities for Payments for Ecosystem Services in England* identified ways in which the planning system could enable payments to be made for ecosystem services provided by the rural-urban fringe. Given the development pressure in these areas, money from developers could be used to finance ecological restoration and environmental management via section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy. The Natural Environment White Paper takes this a step further, suggesting a role for "biodiversity offsets" where habitats degraded or destroyed by development could be created elsewhere to compensate for their loss. In an attempt to halt biodiversity loss by 2020, Local Nature Partnerships will be established to co-ordinate the multiple benefits of land management at a landscape scale. Linked to this, the rural urban fringe may be a prime candidate for some of the proposed "nature improvement areas" where there are significant opportunities to connect urban green infrastructure with rural habitats at a landscape scale. Twelve such areas will be established in the first instance, supported by £7.5 million funding.

The Defra White Paper also announced the intention to create a new non-statutory designation for community greenspace; allowing local people to identify and protect greenspace that is valuable and important to them. The rural urban fringe is expected to have a key role here but raises important questions about the best way to use green space for the benefit of society as a whole.

# Presentations and Publications



Alister Scott presenting at the AAG annual meeting, April 2011

Since the last newsletter the project team have disseminated findings through presentations and publications.

## Presentations

"What a waste of space", paper presented to ACES conference, December 2010 (A Scott)

"The nature of urban rural relationships: rethinking the urban-rural divide as new opportunity spaces", presentation at Local Enterprise Partnership workshop, January 2011 (A Scott)

"Managing environmental change at the rural-urban fringe", presentation to the Wye, Severn and Avon Vales Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Area, April 2011 (B Stonyer)

"Whose fringe is it anyway? Prospects and opportunities for integrated management of the rural-urban fringe (RUF)", presentation at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) annual meeting, April 2011 (A Scott)

"Should spatial planning jump into bed with ecosystem services: new theoretical developments from an exciting liaison", paper presented at the Planning Theory Conference at the University of West of England, May 2011 (A Scott and C Carter).

All presentations can be found on the project website.

## Publications

### The Rural-Urban Fringe - Forgotten Opportunity Space?

Planning policy has consistently struggled to adapt to the multiple demands and rapidly changing nature of development within the rural-urban fringe, but Alister Scott and Claudia Carter argue that marrying the ecosystem approach with spatial planning provides a useful means of managing such spaces effectively.

Full reference for this short article: Scott, AJ and Carter C (2011) 'The Rural Urban Fringe - Forgotten Opportunity Space?' *Town and Country Planning*, May/June 2011, pp231-234.

### Managing Environmental Change at the Rural-Urban Fringe

Alister Scott discusses the importance of capturing institutional memory from the past to plan more effectively for the future.

Full reference: Scott AJ (2011) 'Capturing institutional memory: the case of the rural urban fringe workshop, *Tripwire*, March/April 2011, p11.

# The Workshops



## The Workshops

The research team identified and organised seven participatory workshops allowing us to tap into a diverse range of perspectives and experiences with pre-meeting papers/preparations to facilitate focused discussions. All workshops were a great success. Thank you to all who attended and contributed to these events. Reports from the workshops can be viewed on the project website.

- 1. Institutional Memories: Strategic Planning and the rural urban fringe.** 14 planning professionals led by Mark Middleton from Worcester County Council.
- 2. Improving decision making for the sustainable management of the rural-urban fringe .** 25 participants, co-hosted with the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum.
- 3. Long termism in the built environment: the rural-urban fringe and land use, including farming, food, and architecture.** 65 participants, co-hosted with the Green Economics Institute.
- 4. Bridging the rural urban divide through green economic opportunities for Birmingham and our Local Enterprise Partners.** 88 participants, co-hosted with the Birmingham Environmental Partnership, Sustainability West Midlands and the Chamber of Commerce.
- 5. Meeting local needs with local resources in the rural-urban fringe.** 20 participants, co-hosted with Localise West Midlands.
- 6. Values and 'decision making'.** 8 participants, co-hosted with Forest Research.
- 7. Sustainable Urban Futures.** 12 participants, Birmingham Institute of Art and Design.





# Case Studies

An integral part of this project involves relating academic theory to real life (case studies). The case study analysis will be undertaken using a range of methods as outlined below.

Desk-based survey and analysis of policies and plans : to capture key statutory and non-statutory plans relevant to the fringe area and to analyse significant policy initiatives, changes, disjunctures, omissions etc.

Transect identification: A line on the ground will be identified based on key criteria (e.g. stakeholder knowledge; policy analyses; diversity of fringe types; landscape scale; feasibility of analysis). The transect for each case study will provide a focus for study which covers different components and topical issues of the fringe area.

Aerial photograph interpretation of transect area using images taken around 1985 and 2010 to allow historical comparison and identification of 'hot spots' of change along the transect.

Two semi-structured interviews per case study with key people involved in planning and policy related to case study areas to triangulate with information arising from other methods regarding policy emphases, evaluation of policies

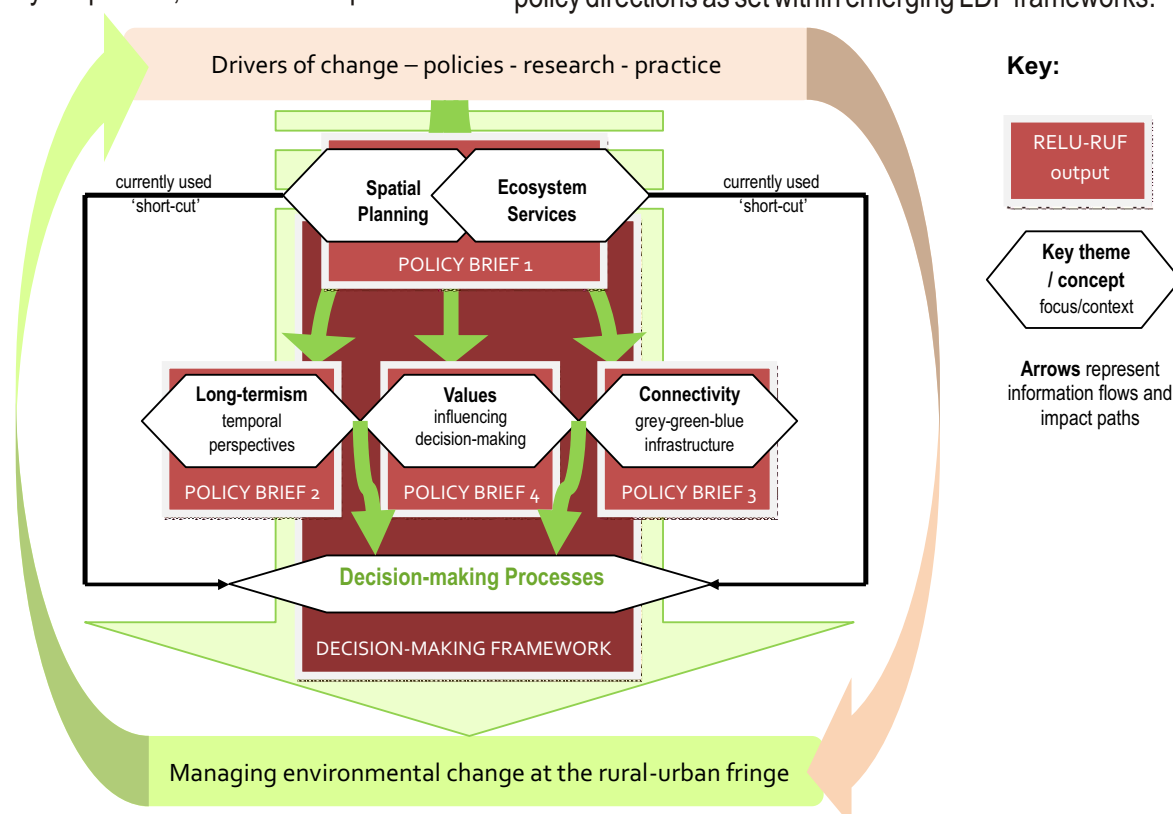
and plans, and help identify successes and failures in terms of processes and outcomes of change.

Visioning exercise (method as per Scott AJ, Shorten J, Owen, R. and Owen IG (2009) 'What kind of countryside do we want: perspectives from Wales UK', *Geojournal*) across each transect using two groups - one consisting of seven respondents from the community and the other of seven professionals - with two facilitators and two support staff. The professionals and community groups will mostly be kept separate except for the briefing at the beginning and end to share experiences at the end of the visioning exercise tour.

Outputs of the case study work is expected to:

- Improve our understanding of the relevant connections between areas of fringe (connectivity analysis) based on the key players and interests within the identified hotspots.
- Systematically analyse how a particular area of RUF has evolved over time and the extent to which policy has shaped that evolution on the ground.
- Elicit professional and public perceptions of changes to the RUF area and ideas for desired futures compared with policy directions as set within emerging LDF frameworks.

Schematic diagram to illustrate RELU-RUF project outputs to inform a decision-making framework for managing environmental change at the rural urban fringe



# The Policy Briefs

## Forthcoming Events

### Planning Research Conference

Planning Resilient Communities  
in Challenging Times,  
September 12-14th  
[www.curs.bham.ac.uk/planning-research-conference-2011/](http://www.curs.bham.ac.uk/planning-research-conference-2011/)

### The Project Conference

The project will culminate in a conference to be held in Birmingham in December this year. To join the mailing list for this event please contact Ben Stonyer (see contact details below).



## Join us on Twitter

Why not follow us on Twitter to keep up to date with all of the latest project news, find us at:  
<http://twitter.com/#!/reluruf>

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

Please contact Alister or Ben on:

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Evidence amassed from reviews of existing literature, seminars and project workshops have helped identify four areas for further study which we feel are critical to the RUF agenda. These will form the subject areas for the policy brief documents to be published later this year. Some of the key questions we are hoping to tackle are listed below.

### POLICY BRIEF 1: Spatial Planning and Ecosystem Services

- To what extent do the ideas inherent in Spatial Planning and Ecosystem Services (as part of the Ecosystem Approach) converge around an agenda, or set of principles, to improve the way we view (and plan and manage) environmental change in the RUF?
- How can we present these ideas in a simple and clear way for decision-makers and the public to understand and engage with?

### POLICY BRIEF 2: Long-termism - Temporal Perspectives

- How can we develop a long-term approach to the RUF that maximises flexibility and resilience whilst managing change to the best advantage?
- How do we square the short-term market and political interests with the long-term needs for sustainable development of the RUF?
- What lessons can we learn from the past to plan for the future?
- What tools should we use?
- What are the barrier to long-term planning and how can these be addressed?

### POLICY BRIEF 3: Connectivity - Grey-Green-Blue Infrastructure Planning

- Where and how is the RUF connected at present?
- Where are the gaps in terms of better coordination and partnership or collaborative or local community or citizen-led approaches in grey-green-blue infrastructure planning and management?
- What governance structures and institutions are needed to effectively manage environmental change and deliver well-being outcomes in the RUF?
- How can the localism agenda contribute to shaping the RUF?

### POLICY BRIEF 4: Values - Influencing Decision-Making

- What are the main values inherent within the RUF?
- How clearly are contested values about the RUF understood and mediated?
- Who is (and is not) involved in the various processes of articulating values and decision-making for the RUF?
- What lessons can we learn from decisions currently/previously made about the management of the RUF?
- How can we make more effective policies and decisions for the RUF?