

## Integrated farm appraisal

"Useful tool for planning,  
it's like holding a mirror up to  
yourself" – farmer's  
impression of IFA process.

### Summary

Integrated advice addresses multiple objectives in the pursuit of "public goods" and benefits the recipient. Previous research (CRN 52) concluded that the provision of advice should be seen as a process, not a product and identified seven steps that should be followed for the successful delivery of integrated advice – informing, enthusing, engaging, evaluating, advising and actioning followed by monitoring.

This research considered one model of integrated advice delivery, The High Weald Integrated Farm Appraisal (IFA), which was developed in line with the steps for successful delivery. The research evaluated the on-farm benefits and the delivery of public benefits, and drew out the issues that need to be addressed by future policy and delivery development.

Conclusions highlight: the importance of the recipients' personal aspirations in the taking forward the IFA's recommendations, in particular the importance of economic benefit; the lack of understanding in the study area of what is meant by integrated advice amongst both farmers and consultants which hindered the development and delivery of truly integrated recommendations; a mismatch between the objectives of the programme, the objectives of the recipient and the skills and expertise of the advisers and; the need for clear and well understood area specific objectives to ensure delivery of public goods.

### Main findings

#### Background

The Integrated Farm Appraisal (IFA) was developed as the main cross cutting element of the High Weald Land Management Initiative (HWLMI) the aim of which was – **"Through research, experimentation and practical demonstration the initiative will develop mechanisms which will deliver effective, integrated rural support, to maintain and enhance the environmental, economic and social fabric of the High Weald"**. The LMI was one of a family of LMIs initiated by the Countryside Agency to test and demonstrate how England's land management and farming systems can respond to the changing demands on agriculture in ways that will maintain a healthy, attractive environment and contribute to thriving rural economies and communities.

"Very thorough, taken aback by  
depth of process" – farmer on quality  
of advice.

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"[The] process didn't stimulate ideas because no ideas exist for this farm."  
 – farmer on quality of advice.

"Would like to know where the £2k went" – farmer on value for money.

The IFA was developed as a process through which land managers could plan the future management of their holding in a sustainable manner. Advice was intended to provide a clear, open minded and rounded view of an individual farm holding, taking full account of economic, environmental and social issues. It was designed to:

- **assess** the entire holding, its resource and management;
- **assist** the farmer/operator to evaluate options for the future;
- **stimulate** thoughts and ideas, and thereby foster enthusiasm and initiatives;
- **educate**, to help bring about environmental enhancement and public access improvements;
- **encourage** new thinking/recognition of value;
- **engender** a sense of pride in the environment and enterprises.

The development programme for the IFA led to its refinement, the development of guidance notes, and the provision of a training programme for advisers. Delivery of the IFA programme was achieved through a Countryside Stewardship Special Project for the High Weald. Up to 25 IFAs per year were produced in the three year period 2000-03.

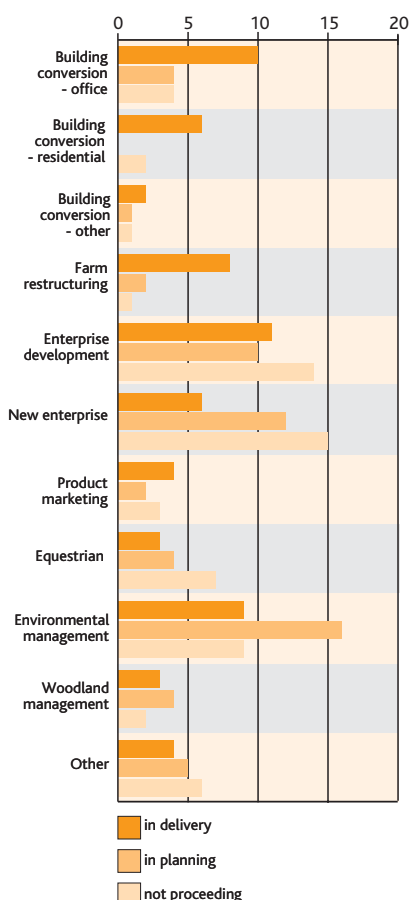
## The IFA evaluation

The evaluation of the IFA considered:

- the effectiveness of the IFA in delivering environmental, social and economic benefits on the farm;
- any blockages limiting delivery of these benefits;
- the impact of the IFA programme in terms of the environmental, social and economic policies for the HWLMI area; and
- any changes needed to the current rural development policy/delivery framework to achieve the full IFA benefits.

The evaluation followed the completion of the first two years delivery of the IFA programme, 38 of the 43 recipients participating in the research.

Figure 1: Implementation status of IFA recommendations



## On farm benefits

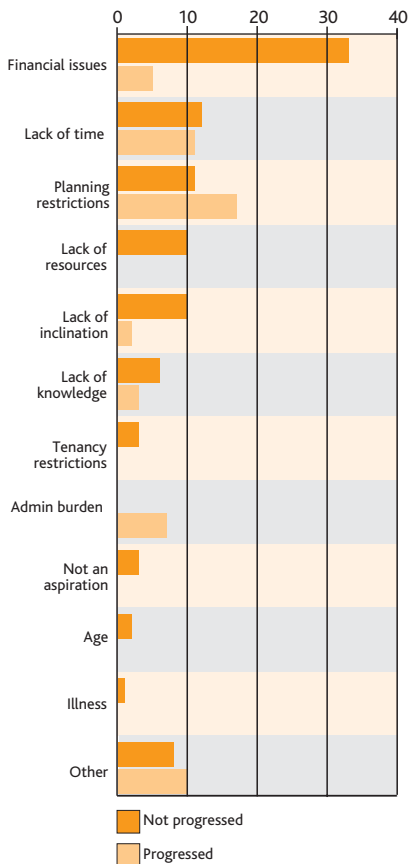
A total of 189 separate recommendations were made in the IFA reports, covering 38 farms. It was found that recommendations favoured options which delivered economic as opposed to social and environmental benefits.

This finding is reinforced when considering the one third of recommendations which have been progressed (see figure 1). This bias towards economic rather than integrated recommendations could be interpreted not only as a result of prioritisation by recipients, but also as an indication of a skills gap in the advisory sector.

Research showed a strong correlation between the degree of progress made on a recommendation and the extent to which recipients had 'bought into' that particular recommendation. Progress was more likely to have been made against recommendations which were initiated by, or of greatest importance to, the IFA recipient. Eighty percent of completed recommendations had been initiated by the IFA recipient.

Recipients were asked to comment whether they expected proposed recommendations to have negative, neutral or positive impacts on social, economic and environmental aspects. Recipients consistently overstated the environmental and social benefits that would be delivered though not the economic benefits. This could highlight a knowledge gap or a greater understanding of economic aspects of the farm business. Only one fifth of recommendations achieved a "win, win, win" scenario across environment, economic and social categories, perhaps indicting a lack of experience in delivering an Integrated or Sustainability agenda.

**Figure 2: Barriers to the progression of IFA recommendations**



**Figure 3: Examples of achievements against area wide objectives**

- To encourage farm diversification**
  - 14 farms reporting increased diversified income
- To develop skills**
  - 7 farmers undertaking further training
- To support wider rural economy**
  - 9 farmers increasing use of local suppliers
- Maintain and enhance High Weald landscape**
  - 186ha land entering Countryside Stewardship,
  - 4.5km hedge planting
- Promote environmental sustainability**
  - 2 waste management plans

## Barriers to implementation

Recipients identified financial issues, planning issues and lack of time as the main barriers to progression of recommendations. While financial issues were seen as the main factor in not progressing recommendations, this was less of a factor in the progressed recommendations (Figure 2). Despite financial issues being identified as a major blockage, rural development grants were only sought in three instances.

## Delivery of area-wide objectives

The research examined the extent to which IFA recommendations could have delivered the public policy objectives relevant to the project area. Outcomes were achieved against all area-wide policy objectives (Figure 3) but these tended to be limited and it appeared that these public objectives had not been fully considered in the formulation of recommendations. The IFA recommendations contributed least to the social objectives for the area.

## Issues for Rural Development policy/delivery framework suggested by findings from this study

### Objective setting

For rural support mechanisms to deliver public policy economic, environmental and social objectives, considerable effort must be made to ensure that these are understood by all involved. The assumption made at the start of the IFA process that local consultants would have a working knowledge and understanding of local objectives, including planning policies, proved false.

As a result, the IFA process largely failed to deliver integrated advice and actions, which met these objectives. Provision of an area-focused summary of relevant objectives and policies could help to overcome this in similar projects in the future.

### Integrated advice

Many consultants and most farmers did not fully understand what is meant by integrated advice, or an integrated approach to the management of their business and holding. This could be addressed through the promotion of best practice examples of integrated options and enterprises to both farmers and their consultants.

### Delivery mechanisms

#### Farmers as Contract Managers and Quality Control

Overall, farmers proved unsuccessful at managing consultants to deliver satisfactory IFAs. Many farmers had not appreciated their role in this and some had little experience of managing these types of contracts with consultants. It is evident that the use of the farmer as Contract Manager for the IFA process was insufficient as a quality control measure.

Additional quality control measures are required to ensure that the outputs from rural development initiatives are delivered. These controls should centre on the selection of appropriate accredited individuals to deliver integrated advice and the backing of farmers regarding the advice to be delivered including: examples of best practice; the benchmarking of outputs against standards prior to final approval for payment; and ultimately the withholding of payment for outputs that fall below these standards or which are not in line with programme and area objectives.

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"Total waste of time, the only people getting any benefits were those doing the process" – sceptic farmer.

"Done at the wrong level, need for detailed advice on how to progress streams" – sceptic farmer.

## Further reading

Countryside Agency (2000). *The High Weald Land Management Initiative: the development of a system of integrated farm appraisals*. Kernon Countryside Consultants, Lechdale and Land Use Consultants.

Land Use Consultants (1998). *High Weald Land Management Initiative: towards an integrated rural support scheme for the AONB*. Land Use Consultants, London.

Government Office for the South East (2002). *Support and advice for farmers and rural business in the South East*. Available from:  
[www.go-se.gov.uk/key%20business/rural/ra\\_current\\_work.htm](http://www.go-se.gov.uk/key%20business/rural/ra_current_work.htm)

Land Management Initiative database  
<http://lmi.rocktimeweb.net/>

## Consultants

The evaluation of the IFA programme has indicated a mis-match between the objectives of the programme, the objectives of the recipients and the skills and expertise of advisers.

Integrated advice needs to be delivered using knowledgeable and experienced individuals who are aware of a broad range of rural development and rural land management issues and opportunities. There are few such individuals. Given the potential demand, there is an urgent need for improved training to increase the numbers of individuals with such skills.

## Implementation

### Advice and Information Networks

The absence of signposting to additional support mechanisms and their limited use suggests that both farmers and consultants involved in this study were not conversant with the available mechanisms and their relevance, and had not applied them to farm circumstances.

This indicates that changes in communication and integrated advice delivery are required to improve the uptake of support mechanisms. A more pro-active targeting of farmers would be beneficial.

### Incentives

The primary concern for farmers is the economic viability of their holdings. In the absence of profitable enterprises, it is unlikely that activities which have social and environmental benefits, and a financial cost will be delivered unless additional funding is available. This again highlights the need to improve awareness of those support mechanisms currently available. Whilst environmental and social initiatives can in some cases also be profitable, there is a need to increase the level of funding for integrated options, and to encourage opportunities for integration of different funding streams.

## Collaborative working

The IFA process focused on the delivery of integrated advice on individual holdings. In a number of instances the implementation of action by the individual farmer was unrealistic, because of either the range of skills or the scale of the actions required. Consequently, there is a need for some actions eg the direct marketing of local produce, to be undertaken collectively or collaboratively. The evaluation therefore recommended that advice and funding for rural development be made sufficiently flexible to support collaborative action and that central support be provided for such projects.

**Countryside Agency Research Notes can be viewed on our website:**  
[www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)