

When it just stays the same

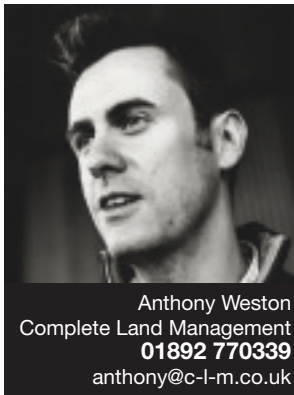
“The more something changes. The more it stays the same.” I’ve never really understood that oxymoronic (or just simply moronic) song lyric but perhaps they were singing about 2010.

If you are a bit sad like me and interested in the bureaucratic machinations of government, 2010 brought a plethora of changes.

The most obvious change was the change in government but to the surprise of many people, mine included, we still have DEFRA, the RPA and Natural England. In a more recent change the RPA got a new chief executive – one who used to run the Child Support Agency, another much maligned quango. That sounds very much like more of the same to me.

One big change to the bureaucratic machine is the abolishing of the regional development agencies like SEEDA. This is a major policy shift which is more significant than the loss of the RDAs. It also means the abandonment of the regionalised structure of all government departments and quangos. I genuinely feel for civil service regional managers everywhere. They are incredibly vulnerable right now and in many cases have been our key points of contact on some great projects that have made a real difference to the rural prosperity of the South East.

Jim Paice responded in a written answer on 9 December to a question from liberal democrat MP Duncan Hames about the future of the socio-economic parts of the RDPE currently delivered by SEEDA. Mr Paice answered that these would be brought back into DEFRA. Well this is no real revelation. Just as NE delivers ES “on behalf of Defra” anyone who has at least dabbled with



capital grants from SEEDA will have seen that they too deliver “on behalf of defra”. So one could say that Mr Paice’s change is no change at all. The real issue is who will actually be delivering the grant on the ground and the answer is most likely the same chaps who have been doing so since the start of the previous programme. They may be core Defra (as they in fact once were) or they may move to the new Local Enterprise Partnerships and deliver “on behalf of defra”. Now there’s another interesting change. I couldn’t help but get

excited when I saw the map showing Kent, East Sussex and Greater Essex together in the new LEP. The proposal goes on to expound the mouth watering prospect of “unlocking the potential of the rural economy” in the region er sorry they don’t exist any more, I mean, area, or counties.

Another big change I discovered during my morning worship at the alter of Humphries and Naughtie. Francis

Maud announced that the CSR cuts and in particular the cutting of quangos we are now all learning to live with were not to be about cost savings at all but about “transparency in government”. Fantastic, transparent democ-

racy that has got to be a good thing. But when I arrived that morning in the office I was disappointed to find my Freedom of Information request response from NE declining to answer any of my queries about regional budgets, the administrative costs of HLS, and penalties incurred by the UK Government due to NE. Hmm not so transparent after all...

Another change that nearly made me eat my hat was the report in this publication last month that the French would

be introducing 3% compulsory ecological set-aside rising to 5% in 2012 set-aside. Now, where does that leave the Campaign for the Farmed Environment? We have now seen the changes proposed for the CAP, widely described as the “greening of the CAP”. This polarises the debate into a totally artificial one about pillar 1 versus pillar 2. Why do we need these distinctions at all, why not merge pillar 1 and 2?

We have had yet another busy year, with new estates to manage, an office move and a new office in Oxfordshire as well as SEEDA grants, HLS applications, SPS returns, NVZ compliance, and Soil Protection reviews. But the real change will never be in the bureaucratic machine which we must learn to live and work with and keep one step a head of, it is in the market, and it is in your business.

How many family farming partnerships which incorporate two or perhaps three generations are currently discussing maintaining the status quo of the business verses chasing profits derived from producing food. Now wheat at £200/ton and OSR at £400/ton those are real changes for the better.

And my personal changes of 2010? Well they can be summarised simply by the high point, the birth of my second son, and the low point, the loss of my most avid SEF reader, Matfield nurseryman and farmer Dick Prall, I will miss you Gramps.

- Farm and Estate management
- Rent Reviews
- Environmental Stewardship
- Ecological Surveys for Planning

Call us on
01892 770 339
or email
info@c-l-m.co.uk