

Minutes of the 1st DRN Steering Group Meeting – 13th November 2003

In Attendance:

Prof. Ian Mercer (Chairing the meeting)	South West Forest
Stewart Horne	West Devon Business Information Point
Mike Ellingham	National Farmers Union
David Whiteley	North & West Devon Economic Partnership
Tom Langton-Davies	MCTI Chairs Forum
David Incoll	West Devon Borough Council
Ian Tearle	Devon Health Forum
Rev. Phillip Wagstaff	Okehampton MCTI Partnership
Steve Hill	Mid Devon District Council
Chris Woodruff	East Devon AONB Partnership
Charlie Taylor	Devon County Council
Jay Talbot	Community Council of Devon
Heather Hillman	Devon County Council
Sarah Wheatley (taking notes)	Devon County Council

Apologies:

Geoff Bateman	Environment Agency
Rebecca Barnett	Business Link for Devon and Cornwall
Dominic Acland	Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust
Prof. Michael Winter (Chairman)	University of Exeter
Phil Collins	English Nature
Eddy Farwell	Devon County Council
Steve Pitcher	North Devon District Council

Agenda

1. Update on progress and conference report
2. Sign up facts and figures
3. DRN support proposal
4. Workshop feedback and interpretation
5. Newsletter
6. SFF seminar on 1.12.03
7. SFF Action Group
8. Funding Reference Group Paper
9. Next Steps:
 - a. Support
 - b. Identity
 - c. Newsletter
 - d. Scoping exercise and gap analysis
 - e. Website
 - f. Action groups and action plan
10. AOB
11. Date of Next Meeting

	ACTION
1. Update on progress and conference report	
Heather gave a brief update on what had happened at the conference, and the fact that there had been a lot of positive feedback.	
2. Sign up facts and figures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were 100 attendees at the conference, and 64 sign ups. It was queried whether there should be an analysis of who has not signed up. ACTION - It was agreed that all those who had not signed up should be chased up. 	Heather
3. DRN support proposal	
Heather explained why such a proposal was necessary.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was queried whether anyone had looked at getting European funding for the positions, and it was agreed that this would be one of the options looked at. Funding is available until the end of the financial year, but a more permanent solution is required for the next financial year. 	
Heather gave detailed reasons for the costings given	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed that the idea of charging people for the next conference should be included, in order to reduce costs. A communications budget and money for developing the identity of the group should be included, although these could maybe come under 'extra assistance'. It was agreed that there is a need to dissociate all 'extra' costs from being swallowed up by the County Council, since it is important that the DRN becomes 'stand-alone' in the future. These should be highlighted and used as in kind match funding. 	
It was agreed that the costings are a good starting point, especially since the amount of work required is still unknown, but that this should be tightened up by the next financial year. It should be noted that an ambition for the group should be to eventually get a full-time, independent manager for the DRN.	
ISSUE – What is the Role of the DRN	
At this point, it was queried what the role of the DRN was, whether it is to be a network of people who add modest value to what is already going on in Devon, or whether the DRN will move things forward and inform policy. Act as a leader to bring other agencies together.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed that the group should be ambitious and aim to promote coherence throughout Devon. It was agreed that the group should take the initiative, lobby central government to see changes made, and drive forward changes for the good of Devon. Although the group would engage with central government, they also need to engage with the community at a level which the community can see and understand. The DRN will provide a 'corporate view', which the DRN will work with central government to help them provide. (which fits in with the Haskins Review). This need not prevent individual agencies who are members of the DRN, from having their own independent views – it would be unlikely that the two would conflict. 	
Heather mentioned that many of these points were raised in the workshops at the launch conference.	
ACTION – Tim Render should be invited to a specially convened meeting after Christmas (and after the next steering group meeting) to discuss the role of the DRN, particularly with regard to the sustainable farming and food agenda..	Heather
ACTION – Individual members to send a written note of their thoughts on the role of the DRN	ALL

to Heather to be included in the minutes.	
ACTION – A draft version of the minutes will be sent round to check that people are happy with what has been written.	Heather
4. Workshop Feedback and Interpretation	
This paper was looked at.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed that when people had had a chance to read the Haskins Review properly, it should be examined where the DRN can fit with the recommendations. 	
5. Newsletter	
Changes to be made:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed that the article on the SFF Action group should be re-worded, since what will be developed is more than an action plan, but not really a strategy. The name of the newsletter should be changed to 'Devon Rural Voice'. A strap line, promoting the vision of the DRN should be added. 	
ACTION – It was agreed that people should look at the Newsletter in their own time and send any comments to Heather by the end of play 14.11.03	ALL
ACTION – Newsletter then to be altered (including the changes above) and sent out to all members of the DRN as soon as possible.	Heather
6. SFF Seminar on the 1.12.03	
Heather mentioned that this is primarily an information item, since everyone should have received their invitations by now. People invited include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone who ticked 'SFF' on their sign up form MEPs/ MPs Others who seemed relevant. 	
7. SFF Action Group	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlie Taylor introduced himself, since he has just started work for DCC 3 days ago. Developing a sub regional SFF action plan is a primary part of his job, and he will be involved in taking this forward through the SFF Action Group of the DRN. It was agreed that this group should be brought together under the remit of the DRN. At present, the Action Group is just a list of names which will be filtered in due course. It was agreed that people who earn a living from farming should be well represented on the group, and that the membership list should be carefully organised and balanced (so that there is a mixture of people representing farming and food). The RDA has approached the DRN to put in a bid for Rural Renaissance, which would possibly be a pilot for the region. Heather and Charlie met with the RDA who gave indications on what they would like to see in the bid. However, the group might not apply for the bid if it does not suit existing needs. The bid itself would be for a 'delegated fund' which would benefit projects undertaking work under the farming and food heading. It was agreed by the members of the Steering Group that efforts should be made to ensure that this money was put 'on the ground' rather than in more paperwork. 	
8. Funding Reference Group Paper	
This is mentioned in the Newsletter, and therefore needs to be approved by the Steering Group.	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One role of the FRG could be to make sure that programmes (particularly rural renaissance) are linked and complementary, to reduce duplication where possible. This is especially important since the RDA has said that they will not accept RR bids which duplicate. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The issue was raised again that the whole project should be about helping people, rather than paper exercises. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was noted that several organisations had had similar experiences with funders, and that the DRN could obtain objective evidence (from the organisations bidding to the main funding agencies) of how things are working. This could then be used to assist funders to operate their programmes in a more 'user friendly' way. The funding group could give bidding organisations – particularly the RR bids, a stronger collective voice. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A draft brief for the group possibly needs to be written down. 	
ACTION – It was agreed that ideas for an initial agenda should be sent in, before Heather convenes the funding group (in the next week).	ALL
ACTION – It was agreed that all Steering Group members should think about how the DRN should influence the RDA and other main funders.	ALL
9. Next Steps	
Most of these had all been covered previously in the meeting, and Heather gave a brief round up:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support – Heather is working on this for the medium term, on the understanding that things might change in the future. 	Heather
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity – More thought for this is required but it is necessary to project a more independent image to members and the outside world. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newsletter – Changes will be made to this, and then it will be sent out. An 'email friendly version' will also be created. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoping exercise and gap analysis – This needs to be discussed in detail at the next meeting. Heather to put thought on paper before then. 	Heather
ACTION – Members should send in details of any strategic projects/strategies/action plans they know of at a District-wide or wider level, to Heather. However MCTI and Parish and Town plans will also be identified where they exist but not their detail.	Heather
ACTION – Malcolm MacDonald should be asked about Local Parish and Town Plans	Heather
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website – Heather will think about this, and get costings. 	Heather
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action Groups and Action Plan – This will be discussed at the next meeting. 	
10. AOB	
ACTION – It was agreed that all documents should be sent via email (so that they can be easily disseminated) and by post as well if necessary.	ALL
ACTION – All documents tabled at this meeting will be sent to members via email.	Heather
ACTION – It was agreed that two further meetings should be arranged: one before Christmas, and one in January, with Tim Render (see Action above)	Heather
ACTION – Thoughts from SG members will be attached to these minutes for circulation in draft .	Heather
11. Date of Next Meeting	
The next meeting will be in Exeter (venue tbc) at 9.30am, Thursday 18th December , and will last approximately 2 hours.	Heather

Feedback on DRN since Steering group Meeting on 13th November 2003

Feedback from Tom Langdon Davis

1. The Strategy document is excellent.
2. It is a result of a highly professional academic consultation process.
3. The implementation of its conclusions is largely down to the agencies who have signed up to it.
4. We are now embarked on a "what's missing" exercise which will continue to inform agencies to enable them better to read the strategy - implementation gap.
5. This will also make the next iteration of the Strategy more powerful.
6. Beyond this, there is a lobbying role as outlined in the Workshop Feedback from the Launch Conference.

My guess is all the above is un-contentious. The next bit might present a challenge to Government Agencies or others currently implementing the present DEFRA agenda.

7. In rural Devon, virtually the whole area is now covered by MCTi.
8. Those areas that are not covered are nearly all either in waiting to start or covered by earlier community processes e.g. Dartmoor and North Devon/ Exmoor.
9. This process is contextualised by existing National, Regional and Sub Regional strategies, which enables agencies to work with it uninhibited.
10. MCTi's have a particular legitimacy deriving from the communities who lead them.
11. MCTi Community Strategic Action Plans will form the basis for District Structure or Spatial Plans in future.
12. In turn District plans will drive upwards to Sub-regional, Regional, and over time eventually to National Policy.
13. This process is only a threat to public servants if they seek to hamper or dilute it.
14. All of us are here to serve this process.
15. None of the above reduces the value or legitimacy of interpretative strategy formulation along the lines conducted by DRN.

Feedback from David Whiteley

1. I believe the Devon Rural Network was "born" out of the importance of doing something for the Devon rural economy post foot and mouth, as an off shoot of the Devon Strategic Partnership, and the lessons learned (foot and mouth) that the rural economy is more than just "farming alone".
2. Michael Winter was tasked with the job of setting up a "rural network" to address what might be perceived as a remoteness of the rural areas of the county and issues affecting them.
3. The rural network was set up, and we have all seen and read the papers connected with that, it's vision and some of the tasks which it dealt does. In the final stages of drafting it's "mini constitution" there were two additions which I thought important and these were to do with trying to bring "coherence" to the delivery of the economy and social inclusive policies of the county. Also, because of the geography of the county, to emphasis that we cannot separate rural and urban totally because of the huge inter relationships between the two.
4. At the meeting I felt there was a danger (with my cynic's hat on) that effectively we would be "just another partnership building up a bit of a network" "filling the gaps". Devon already has it's own economic partnership, the sub regions of Devon has their economic partnerships, the RDA has a strategy and nearly everybody else you can think of has a strategy impacting upon the county, it's economic development in the holistic sense.
5. I genuinely think that if you were to add value to the work of economic development so include the social inclusive elements of that in the county we should play our coherence role much more strongly. We should try to bring together all the players who have a strategic or delivery role and bring coherence to what actually is delivered at the sharp end in the county and this should include the county council, the district council's, the RDA, Go South West, and all central government funding streams and the National Quangos (Countryside Agency, Environment Agency, English Nature etc).
6. The opportunity arises for two reasons. First we are a young organisation which is trying to add value to the county and one of whose duties in it's constitution is "coherence". Second is the Haskin's report

which says that the government should just think about strategy and allow the delivery mechanisms much more flexibility at the front end.

7. I therefore believe that we should try and bring onboard a commitment from all those parties to own up to a single economic development plan (to embrace the social aspects) for the whole county and in particular we should make sure the central government funding streams (per Haskins) are partners with us in delivery with a capacity to be flexible at the margins to deliver more effectively what is best for Devon.
8. If this sort of summary of what I think I said is not what you thought you heard or even not good enough, please give me a ring and I'll happily discuss, and perhaps, start again.

Moving on I also said I thought we ought to have a very simple strapline so that in a sentence or less everybody knows the business we are about. Again "opening mouth before engaging brain" I was tasked with giving you some suggestions. I'm not a wordsmith, or proud, but I think something like "Everyone working together for a better Devon" whilst not pretty, encapsulates what I mean. Another possible strapline, a lot more "whizzy" could be "Team Devon".

Feedback from David Incoll

On ambition I would suggest -identifying key messages for rural Devon and advocating and promoting those priorities at European, National and regional level.

I am content with newsletter as it stands. Obviously we can broaden the contents in future issues.

I will work further on funding proposals both European and West Devon.

Further comments

I feel that a great deal of the discussion at the meeting and that above is covered in the 'coherence' section on page 5 of the Foundation Paper. This can be interpreted in such a way as to encompass the ambitions for the DRN which were put forward at the meeting.

We need to remember to include the environment in all discussions, in addition to economic and social issues because in Devon the environment is one of the main assets.

Stronger Together is the strapline of the Devon Strategic Partnership and 'A Strong voice for Rural Devon' is what is on the front of the Foundation paper. It might cause confusion if we were to change this now?