

**Devon Rural Network
Steering Group Meeting
Thursday 22nd January 2004 2.00pm at NFU Offices, Pynes Hill, Exeter**

Present:

Prof. Michael Winter	- Exeter University - Chair – DRN
Prof. Ian Mercer	– South West Forest – Vice Chair DRN
Heather Hillman	- Devon County Council – DRN Facilitator
Eddie Farwell	- Devon County Council - DSP Facilitator
Dominic Ackland	- Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust
Phil Collins	- English Nature
Chris Woodruff	- East Devon AONB
Les Roper	- South West RDA – Devon Team
Gary Ensor	- Business Link / Farm Advisory Service
Steve Pitcher	- North Devon DC
Tom Langdon Davis	- Chair - MCTI Chairs Forum
Ian Tearle	– North & East Devon Health Authority
Jay Talbot	– Community Council of Devon
Geoff Bateman	– Environment Agency
David Incoll	- West Devon Borough Council
Rev. Philip Wagstaff	- Church / Okehampton MCTI
Mike Ellingham	- National Farmers Union

Apologies from:

Stuart Horne	- West Devon Business Information Point
David Whiteley	- North & West Devon Economic Partnership
Dr. Sue Brownlow	- South West RDA – Devon Team
Stephen Hill	- Mid Devon District Council

Introductions were made around the table and Michael Winter welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Funding for DRN 2004/05

HH reported back on the funding situation for DRN secretariat and co-ordination 2004/05. The National parks have agreed to contribute £1,000 between them and the Countryside Agency offered £2,000. WDBC has offered £1,000 (possibly more) and David I has had a positive response from at least 3 of the other Districts but no formal offers yet. This totals £7,000 plus £15,000 cash and 3 days per week in kind for DRN co-ordination worth £18,000 from DCC. A further £2,000 could be raised from conference charges and £1,000 is estimated in in kind room bookings.

Action: David I to chase districts for formal offers if/when appropriate.

The total cost for the secretariat and DRN development over the next financial year was estimated at £62,500 and we have £43,000 towards this.

There was some discussion around the refusal by the RDA to support the DRN financially and the fact that there is money to support sub regional economic partnerships. Steve P indicated that perhaps the DSP should decide what sub partnerships it wants sitting under it in terms of the DRN and the EP etc and then lobby the RDA to support these. Eddie F suggested that in time the four pillars of the community strategy could be used as the basis for sub partnerships and that DRN could be responsible for the 'Environment as an economic driver' pillar. There was some feeling that the DRN was wider than this.

Action: Eddie F to sound out DSP on support and views on sub partnerships.

The general conclusion was that the DRN should continue to seek extra funding, however in the meantime should try and achieve as much as possible with the resources available to prove that the DRN is worthy of

further investment in the future. There was a suggestion that the RDA could provide support in kind through secondment of the support post.

**Action: Les R to repeat the request to Sue Brownlow.
Action: Michael W to write a further letter on the subject to the RDA.**

2. Progress on Haskins

Michael W explained that he is on the Rural Priorities Board who are going to follow the progress of policy following the Haskins report. Mike E pointed out that the legislation for the proposed new land management agency will not be ready until 2006 and DEFRA are not consulting on it.

The group considered the DRAFT letter to Margaret Beckett from the DRN, regarding Haskins. Jay T suggested that the DRN needs to be more strongly promoted in the letter. David I said that while there were some concerns with the detail of the report, the important thing was that the government hold on to the vision of Haskins throughout the emerging changes and not lose sight of the end goal. We must also emphasise that the South West is different to the rest of the country in its urban rural make up and that the key will be in flexibility towards funding so that we can make the best use possible of monetary resources and local knowledge.

Jay T also emphasised the need for a period of stability with regard to funding programmes, contacts etc – constant change makes it very difficult for people to progress projects. The changes need to be got right so things don't need to be changed again for a number of years.

Action: Michael W to re draft letter according to views and circulate to the steering group.

3. Draft Community Strategy

Eddie F circulated Chapters 3 and 4 of the draft Devon Community Strategy entitled 'Biodiversity and Landscape' and 'Economic Value of the Environment' respectively.

**Action: Eddie F to circulate chapters 3 & 4 (via Heather if more convenient)
Action: All to feedback to Eddie efarwell@devon.gov.uk**

There were comments that the strategy was very 'top down' and queries about where the existing DSP strategies like the rural strategy fit in? Also need to include where communities are helping themselves or need to. There is potential for the DRN to have significant role in contributing to the strategy and implementing the actions in the final version.

Heather H pointed out that in order to assist with formulating action plans for both the rural strategy and the relevant chapters of the community strategy, as well as developing the DRN, a core group of people with more time than those on the steering group would be needed. She suggested that she be authorised to convene a small group of say 6 people with different backgrounds and interests relevant to the mix on the steering group, who would have more time to work on ideas and an action plan in between the steering group meetings. This was agreed.

Action: Heather H to convene a small DRN officer working group.

4. DRN Sustainable Farming and Food Action Group

Ian M reported that Charlie Taylor has now recruited a core group to take forward the Sustainable Farming and Food agenda and form an action plan for Devon (under Ian M's chairmanship) and they will have their first meeting on 23rd February 2004. They will also act as the working group for the development of the SFF RR bid. Heather H reported that she and Charlie have had one meeting with Diana Mompoloki from the RDA and have submitted a letter setting out basic principles of working with the RDA as well as outline draft proposals for themes on which the bid can be based. They have another meeting with Diana M on 2nd February 2004 but had not received written feedback from Diana. The working group will take ownership of the bid and the themes etc once they are convened but it was felt important for Charlie and Heather to start the ball rolling.

5. DRN Funding Reference Group (Rural Renaissance)

Michael W went through the 5 main RR bids affecting Devon (for further information on these please contact Heather) and the funding group came up with a number of common issues to take up with the RDA. Michael will draft a letter to Sir Harry Studholm, copied to various RDA officers, requesting a meeting with all the RR partnerships to try and resolve some of these issues as follows:

- a. Confusion over geographical coverage and sectors of the different schemes.
- b. The extent to which the schemes needed to address innovation.
- c. Potential links with the Market and Coastal Town Initiative, the Workspace Strategy and the Tourism, Arts, Sport and Culture Initiative.
- d. Scale of the finance entailed and the different intervention rates.
- e. The difficulty in raising match funding.
- f. The willingness of the RDA to delegate responsibility to the delivery partnerships.
- g. The timescales for setting up the schemes.
- h. The contrast with the attitudes of other RDA's.

There were concerns that this letter does not slow any response towards individual bids, from the RDA .

Action: Michael W to approve dates and send letter to RDA.

Action: Heather to convene next meeting once dates have been decided.

6. Land Between the Moors Initiative

There was some discussion about this Countryside Agency Initiative and the general consensus was that it should be nested under the DRN or DRS. Phil C who is on the steering group said that these concerns were being taken into account and an action plan is being written. There was enthusiasm for a presentation on the initiative from the CA at the next meeting.

Action Heather H to arrange presentation from CA or Terrafirma consultants.

7. Date and time of next meeting

2.00pm on Monday 19th April at West Devon Borough Council Offices, Okehampton. If you need directions please contact Heather Hillman.

Action: David I to book and confirm with Heather.