

# Devon Rural Network Steering Group Minutes

2.00pm on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2005, County Hall, Exeter

## Present

Ian Mercer – South West Forest - acting Chair  
Jay Talbot – Community Council of Devon  
Gordon Cleaver – Mid-Devon District Council  
Sue Brownlow - SWRDA  
Steve Pitcher – North Devon District Council  
David Incoll – Devon Chief Executives Group

Philip Wagstaff – Okehampton MCTi / Faith Groups  
Mike Ellingham – National Farmers Union  
Chris Woodruff – Devon AONB Partnerships  
Andrew Lightfoot - DCC  
Heather Hillman – DRN Co-ordinator  
Chris May – DRN

## Apologies

Michael Winter – University of Exeter, Chair of DRN  
Sue Smith –DCC  
Phil Collins – English Nature  
David Whitely - North & West Devon Economic Partnership  
Dominic Acland – Torbay Coast & CountrysideTrust

## 1. Introductions and distribution of new publications.

Ian welcomed participants. Gordon Cleaver was introduced, replacing Stephen Hill, Andrew Lightfoot as substitute for Sue Smith, and Chris May as temporary assistance for DRN.

Copies of the new DRN leaflet, Terms of Reference, and Action Plan were distributed.

Minutes of the last meeting were accepted without amendment.

## 2. DRN staffing

(This item was moved forward on the agenda to accommodate members who had to leave early)

The staffing paper was presented with advice that the budget needs revising now that the Countryside Agency are no longer able to provide financial support.

There was discussion around the provision of policy development and advice in addition to the co-ordination and work development role of the DRN Co-ordinator. The essential message is that while the DRN is not a policy-making organisation, however there is a need to retain within the DRN the capability to analyse and assess policy, and above all there must be flexibility for the staff to undertake work in several areas.

Sue Brownlow queried the variation from the approach advocated at a meeting of local authority Chief Executives a few months previously. In discussion, it was felt that the establishment of the DRN Action Plan and the links of the DRN members to the Rural Delivery Review and other policy initiatives established a good foundation for the DRN staff support to focus on facilitation of the Action Plan.

It was also clarified that the intent of the staffing proposal is that the DCC contribution includes cash plus the in kind time of the Rural Project Officer post currently undertaking the role of DRN Co-ordinator and not to create a new post.

**Action: Heather to revise the staffing paper to reflect new budget details, and to reflect the tone of the discussions on this issue, and to be resubmitted to the SWRDA.**

**Action: David Incoll to write to the districts and national park authorities requesting contributions from them.**

## 3. 2004 Winter Event report.

The printed report about the 2004 Winter Event was presented and noted.

#### 4. Setting up of new DRN Action Groups

The Winter Event report included notes on the existing Sustainable Food and Farming, Environment Devon and Devon Forum (Community and Voluntary Sectors) Action Groups and the new Funding Reference, and Rural Proofing Action Groups. The Sustainable Tourism Action Group notes were presented under Item 5.

*Rural Proofing* – discussion centred around the importance of Rural Proofing to the DRN, especially through Local Area Agreements, the Devon Strategic Partnership, and Local Strategic Partnerships.

The Steering Group agreed that, without unduly interfering with the preparation of the Rural Renaissance bid, work should continue on presenting Rural Proofing in a suitable way for the DRN to influence policy development and implementation. Suggested first targets of attention are: the Regional Spatial Strategy, DEFRA consultations on Social Inclusion, and Local Area Agreements. The Rural Proofing Action Group (RPAG) will also need to consider mechanisms for finding out about proposed policies and consultations in enough time to provide effective input. The RPAG will also need to consider having a wider pool of DRN members to help with consideration of new policies and consultations if and when there are multiple papers to consider and/or short deadlines for input.

Chris is co-ordinating the RPAG, and Ian Mercer, Steve Pitcher, Philip Wagstaff, and Jay Talbot volunteered as foundation members. Pauline Warner of DCC was also suggested as a member.

**Action: Chris to develop the RPAG, and report to next DRN Steering Group meeting.**

#### 5. Rural Renaissance progress report.

The meeting notes from the 13/1/04 Rural Renaissance Working Group, the DRN Sustainable Communities RR Paper, and four activity matrices were presented, discussed, and noted.

- The *Sustainable Farming and Food Action Group* (SFFAG) has an Action Plan (see item 5), and a new Group membership is being formed.
- The *Sustainable Tourism Action Group* (STAG) has some core members and is gathering some more to consider in detail the activities of different Tourism organisations in the County – to complete the Activity Matrix. A larger event including a much wider representation of the Sustainable Tourism industry is planned in the near future. One of the goals of the Event will be to form a firmer STAG to work to the DRN on the Rural Renaissance work and other activities in Devon.
- The *Environmental Technologies Action Group* (ETAG) industry representatives have been identified to provide input to the RR documents, drawing on the Renewable Energy Devon programme that has been established to deliver the Devon Renewable Energy Strategy and Action Plan, and a SW Environmental Technology Strategy that is being developed by the SWRDA.
- The *Rural Business Support Action Group* (RBSAG) is being led by Graham Walker from Teignbridge District Council and EHOD. Graham is using the September 04 meeting of the EHOD as the basis for the work on the activity matrix for this group, and including a strong representation from the private sector.

**Action: HH to consider District representation on the RR Working Group, while remaining aware of the 50/50 split of public/private representation requested by the SWERDA.**

In general, support for the proposal is still positive, and the need to keep moving quickly on the RR bid was agreed by the DRN. Sue Brownlow said that if we need to have more district reps on the working group and this tips the balance of members towards statutory, SWRDA will not consider this a problem.

It was agreed that these action groups are a good example of the value of the DRN – members using their specialist expertise and connections to deliver results for rural Devon.

It was noted that the four sectoral action groups have been asked to consider and complete the activity matrices by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February for amalgamation, with the revised documents being submitted to the SWERDA by Friday 11<sup>th</sup> February. The next Rural Renaissance Working Group meeting is on 21<sup>st</sup> February at County Hall.

While there is scope in the current RR bid documents for social and community engagement and work, some members of this Group felt that there is a heavier emphasis on economy than on community and the title of the bid (Sustainable Rural Communities) did not accurately represent the focus of the programme.

**Action: Develop alternative titles for the bid to more accurately represent both the focus of the bid and future developments, such as Sustainable Economies for Rural Communities.**

The DRN Steering Group agreed that the DCC is the most appropriate Accountable Body for the RR bid.

## **6. Sustainable Farming and Food Action Plan.**

The SFF Action Plan for Devon is being finalised with just formatting details to be completed. The Action Plan has been developed by the initial SFF Action Group and covers activities and delivery for the next 12 months. The new Action Group to implement the action plan for SFF is being formed with Dominic Acland as the Chair, and Carol Trant and Mary Talbot-Rosevere of the original SFFAG. The Steering Group agreed that the SFFAG needs practitioners in addition to strategic members.

The Steering Group agreed that while there is still overlap between the six Action Themes, the SFF Action Plan is a good product, endorsed it, and expressed appreciation to the members of the Action Group.

**Action: Kate Harris to complete drafting changes and produce final document and Dominic Acland to call the first meeting.**

## **7. Devon Strategic Partnership linkages.**

The Devon Strategic Partnership (DSP) set up the Rural Task Group to prepare the Devon Rural Strategy and this resulted in setting up the Devon Rural Network. Although there has been little contact since then, with the delivery of the Devon Community Strategy its next task, the DSP is now looking to make the contact between the two Groups more formal again.

A note from Mari Davis of the DSP to the DRN co-ordinator that asked some questions to inform the next DSP meeting in February was tabled. A short discussion was held to answer each of the questions raised.

In addition to this request for information, the DSP through Mari asked if the DRN thought it should have a representative on the DSP Steering Group. Ian Mercer agreed to be the DRN representative if the chair is happy with this, especially as a major concern is Rural Proofing. It was agreed that DRN should indicate that it would like to be invited to sit on the DSP steering group.

It was also noted that the DSP is the major vehicle for developing and delivering the Local Area Agreement pilot in Devon. There are four blocks of work in the LAA: Children and Young People; Safer and Stronger Communities; Healthier Communities; and Older People, with cross-cutting issues of: environment, culture, regeneration, and economy. For example housing is an issue across the four blocks, and there are opportunities to build links between organisations at different levels and well as different locations to make this happen now and in the longer term. The LAAs have the potential for great importance in the devolution of responsibility from Central Government to Local Government, and the DRN should take an active role as possible in the implementation of measures.

**Action: Andrew to brief Ian more thoroughly on the LAA in preparation for his involvement in DSP.**

**Action: HH to contact Mari to request an invitation to sit on the DSP steering group and pass to Ian Mercer.**

## **8. Rural Innova Interreg iic**

A brief report on the background and activities of the Rural Innova project was made and noted. Rural Innova is a project based on non-agricultural rural development and is proposed to run until September 2006. The Devon County Council is involved in two of the four components *innovative economic actions* and *tools & methods for the sustainable development of the territories*, and Heather suggested that the DRN should be involved.

The Steering Group agreed that the DRN Co-ordinator has a role in finding opportunities like this and bringing them to the attention of the DRN. The Group also agreed that, as in this case, the Co-ordinator can make decisions about involvement at this level without first gaining approval from the whole Steering Group.

## **9. Date and time of next meeting.**

**9.30am - 11.30am on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March, in Okehampton. Venue to be confirmed.**