

**Devon Rural Network
Consultation Response Action Group
Coaver Library Room, 9.30am – 12noon
Wednesday 3rd August 2005.**

Minutes

Attendees:

Graham Walker	Teignbridge DC
Philip Wagstaff	Faith Groups
Steve Pitcher	North Devon DC
Ian Mercer (Chair)	South West Forest
Pauline Warner	Devon CC
Rory Cunningham	Rural Community Council of Devon
Lynne del Greco	SW Regional Development Agency
Mike Ellingham	NFU
Martin Weiler	Environment Agency
Tissie Roberts	Exmoor National Park
Denise Ramsay	English Nature
Heather Hillman	Devon Rural Network
Lisa Henry	Devon Rural Network

1. Welcome and introduction

IM thanked everyone for their attendance and requested that everyone introduced themselves as it was the first meeting of the group.

2. What is rural proofing

LH introduced the discussion paper that had been tabled prior to the meeting. The paper had been drafted to ensure a broad understanding of what is meant by rural proofing, its relevance and importance to the Devon Rural Network.

Discussion followed around some of the issues, the main points that were agreed are noted below:

- Our purpose is not to scrutinise the work of agency's internal rural proofing teams (both the Regional Assembly and the Regional Development Agency have one) but to objectively rural proof documents based on our own agreed criteria for Devon which will challenge the document more specifically and strongly.
- The CRAG may not always be rural proofing a document or policy but can also work with DRN Action Groups and the Steering Group on lobby documents.
- We need to promote the work of the CRAG through the Devon Strategic Partnership
- We need a wide sign up to the criteria to be used, and have this published so the process is transparent and open. Acknowledging that some members may wish to also submit their individual responses.
- It was noted that the process may identify issues that DRN currently has no 'position' on. Such issues should be taken to the steering group for consideration.
- We should try to identify colleagues in other counties of the South West with which to share our information when working on Regional Documents as this may help strengthen the message.

Action: HH and LH to prepare a paper for the DRN representative on the DSP (Ian Mercer) to table. To promote the work of the DRN and the 'rural proofing' services of the CRAG to other partnerships formed under the auspices of the DSP.

3. Agreement of the process maps

Two process maps were tabled. An initial map detailing the steps we need to discuss to form a robust approach to rural proofing documents. The second detailed a flow chart of how an individual consultation response would be managed.

With respect to the initial work the following was agreed:

- That for the majority of cases documents would only be considered if they were Devon-wide or greater in their geographical coverage. Exceptions to this include: coastal issues; and European funding for example Objective 2.
- The DRN would develop a calendar of forthcoming consultations. This may be published on the website.
- Members of the CRAG will be expected to nominate themselves as specialist support in specific topic areas to enable the DRN secretariat to call upon their support for the initial rural proofing exercise.
- When agreed the checklist would be published on the website and form part of the terms of reference to ensure the process is open and transparent.
- The checklist would be agreed by the Steering Group and the CRAG would request a formal mandate from the Steering Group to enable responses to be agreed within the CRAG and not require individual responses to be approved by the Steering Group.

With respect to the individual consultation response process the following was agreed:

- When receive the consultation/ document send a newsflash email to members and signpost them to the original document/ website. Do not invite comment at this stage.
- It was agreed that it is critical that we not only identify positive and negative impacts but that we identify where there are gaps in policy provision. This could be particularly important when looking at planning documents for example.
- In addition it is imperative that we offer suitable alternative wording to policies with which we are not happy. It is not valid to respond only with an objection.
- Once the matrix of criteria has been completed for the individual document this would be circulated to the CRAG for their broad agreement, before being written up as a consultation response.
- When completed the draft consultation response a second newsflash email to be sent to members and link to our response on our website. We will accept comment at that time. It was noted that care should be taken over getting more publicity/ circulation than intended at draft stage through using the website.
- A meeting of the CRAG would then be held if there were issues to be discussed. If everyone is happy an email sign off would be acceptable.
- Important that the response includes a caveat to the effect of the representation of the CRAG and the process through which we have reached our conclusions.
- After submission the DRN Secretariat would monitor any policy changes as a result of our response. If there is no change a dialogue would be entered into to understand why.

Action: LH to draw together the initial process into a terms of reference document for the group with the individual response process to be appended.

4. The tools available for rural proofing

LH had circulated an initial matrix of the DRN's aims and objectives set against the Countryside Agencies policy maker's rural proofing questions.

It was agreed that the Devon Rural Strategy's aims are an appropriate set of criteria against which to judge policies and documents. However, it was too difficult to discuss these in a meaningful way in a large group and work was needed to make them more appropriate to the aims as set out in the Devon Rural Strategy.

In addition it was pointed out that we need to develop some strategic level overarching questions in advance of applying more specific criteria.

Action: HH and LH to develop a DRN specific set of rural proofing criteria. PW offered assistance.

Action: LH and HH to arrange a meeting with the Countryside Agency section responsible for rural proofing to discuss our criteria and process.

5. Roles and responsibilities

No paper was tabled but from earlier discussion it had been agreed that one of the key roles of the CRAG was to act as specialist support to the DRN Secretariat to perform the detailed proofing activity.

The CRAG would meet on an ad hoc basis dependant upon the calendar of forthcoming consultations.

IM had agreed to perform the role of Chair for the inaugural meeting and by unanimous approval was asked to take on the role. The position of Chair is to be reviewed annually.

Action: IM to act as Chair of the CRAG, with an annual review of the position.

6. Regional Spatial Strategy – timetables and next steps

PW noted that the Regional Assembly, on behalf of the Government, will publish the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy in October. A period of consultation will follow. The formal submission will be made in March 2006, with the Examination in Public taking place in Early 2007. The final document is due in Autumn '07.

PW highlighted that if we make policy recommendations and these become subject to EiP a representative of the CRAG will need to attend.

7. Regional Economic Strategy - timetables and next steps

LdG followed with a feedback on the timetable for the revision of the Regional Economic Strategy. The first stage of consultations has been completed and the internal team are now working to publish the consultation draft by 20th September, which will be launched at an event in Torquay. It has been evident from the initial consultations that there is little appetite for changing the core of the strategy. If anyone has not been invited to the launch event in Torquay and would like to attend please contact LdG.

Consultation will take place until the end of November 2005. The RDA Board will sign it off in February 2006, with Ministerial sign-off by Easter 2006.

Action: LdG to send LH a 10-page summary of the progress to date. (This has been completed, meeting set for 14th September)

8. AOB

There were no matters of any other business to be discussed.

9. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is **Thursday 6th October at 2pm** at the Environment Agency Offices, Exminster. This will be to agree the criteria to be used.

Prior to this it will be necessary to contact and arrange meetings of the RES and RSS specialist support and the DRN Secretariat to follow soon after this meeting. (The specialist support that has been identified for the RSS is: Pauline Warner and Philip Wagstaff and for the RES is: Steve Pitcher).