

**Devon Rural Network
Consultation Response Action Group
English Nature Offices, Renslade House, 2.00 – 4.30pm
Wednesday 7th December 2005**

Minutes

Attendees:

Ian Mercer (Chair)	South West Forest
Philip Wagstaff	Churches Together in Devon
Dennis Brewer	NFU
Lynne del Greco	SW Regional Development Agency
Denise Ramsay	English Nature
Heather Hillman	Devon Rural Network
Lisa Henry	Devon Rural Network

Apologies:

Pauline Warner	Devon CC
Tissie Roberts	Exmoor National Park
Rory Cunningham	Rural Community Council of Devon
Steve Pitcher	North Devon DC
Martyn Warren	Plymouth University Rural Futures Network
Martin Weiler	Environment Agency
Graham Walker	Teignbridge DC

1. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting on 6th October 2005 were agreed a true record.

It was reported that the Steering Group had endorsed the request of the CRAG to complete consultation responses to the agreed formula without the need for their individual approval. However they did desire at each Steering Group meeting to see a calendar of forthcoming consultations so they could offer advice on prioritisation and request further input on particular documents if considered appropriate.

All other matters arising appeared on the agenda with the exception of the LAA which would be covered under AOB.

2. The Regional Economic Strategy – discussion

The consolidated response to the SWRDA had been circulated prior to the meeting. A discussion took place regarding the format, layout and content of the response.

It was agreed that we would remove the 'Justification' column as it had not been completed. The format of the letter was considered to be appropriate and holds together well.

On a content matter the group agreed that we should demonstrate some scepticism regarding the mainstreaming of 'rural' throughout the document and that we are right to withhold our complete support for this policy. Dennis requested that the CRAG, in support of the NFU, could make the point that farms are businesses and that the two should not be considered as distinct. Farms are

businesses and post 2007 diversification and general business support for agriculture will be even more critical.

In addition, the group asked that we highlight the importance of greater links between the RES and the RSS as without delivery policy, the RSS will not succeed.

Lisa noted that an e-flash to DRN members regarding the RES response had been sent and all responses so far had been positive.

3. The Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy is currently available in First Draft stage, version 1.92. The logic of rural proofing each version in the run up to formal Deposit Draft was questioned, and it was agreed that we would want to have influence over the policy formulation before it goes on formal Deposit (recognising that Deposit gives us a second chance to influence and to formally register any concerns) but that we should wait for the second draft which we expect to be available in January/February. There should at this stage be a focus on rural proofing policy and considering background information and evidence only where relevant to policies that are being questioned.

4. Local Development Frameworks – Rural Proof?

As Local Development Frameworks are being drafted by Local Authorities in conjunction with the Regional Spatial Strategy it was felt important that we make a decision if they are going to be rural proofed, or not. They are not Devon-wide and therefore do not meet our general criteria for rural proofing but the DRN team wanted the CRAG's endorsement of this decision.

It was agreed that they are not appropriate documents for the CRAG to rural proof. As the process is refined we may in the future offer the service of rural proofing to Authorities/ Agencies within Devon, on a consultancy basis or run training courses for others to use our criteria, but not at present.

5. Calendar of forthcoming rural proofing exercises

Lisa noted that she is still trying to determine the scope and details of the consultation on Primary Care Trusts in the South West. In addition we are yet to hear any more from Moses Warburton who made a presentation to the last meeting regarding Patient Transport Services.

Lynne noted the new plans for Business Link with regard to the geographical changes proposed, namely, Somerset is to be part of a larger Devon, Cornwall and Somerset organisation. The new business plan is being written and they are aware of the need to have a rural focus. In conversation with B. Link Lynne had made them aware of the DRN and the CRAG and would recommend the two organisations talking to each other. Lynne was asked to pass on Heather's contact details to Andy MacDonald who is working on the Business Plan, to make contact. Dennis offered his concerns as not all B. Links have a good reputation with rural businesses and felt that the opportunity for a proactive approach should be welcomed.

6. Devon County Council Corporate Plan

Heather informed the group that we have been asked to rural proof the County Council's Corporate Plan and wanted confirmation from the group that this was considered a valuable exercise.

It was agreed unanimously, and the team should proceed as soon as possible. Heather felt that she may have time before the Christmas break. Any immediate comments on the draft circulated should be with Heather by 19th December '05.

The issue of confidentiality was questioned with reference to an e-flash to the DRN membership with regard to this exercise. It was decided that Lisa should check with David Slocombe before proceeding but that it should be a public document.

7. AOB

A question was raised with regard to the DEFRA Rural, Social and Community Programme Fund and progress made with regard to the Devon delivery plan for April 06. Lisa noted that the first draft was to be submitted to GOSW by 16th December and we would expect a brief response from GOSW before the Christmas break. *(This has been completed and a second draft is now being worked on. GOSW were broadly happy with the progress and proposed projects to date.)*

Progress on rural proofing the LAA was also raised. Heather noted that a rural proofing table had been completed for each of the three blocks completed to date. These were circulated and Heather picked out some key points. Namely, it was clear that the three blocks had been compiled by different people with very different styles; the target audience was not clear; much use was made of acronyms with no glossary; and only a small degree of cross-referencing was included. The point was made that if these documents are internal working documents then the format, and style are appropriate but this again raised two key issues. Firstly that we would want to rural proof strategy and not delivery plans in the future (although it was recognised that in this instance that was not possible as the strategy was completed before the group was formed) and it highlighted the importance of technical assistance to support the DRN team.

Heather will collate the tables into a formal response document and circulate for any specific comments.

Thanks were offered to Denise and English Nature for the use of their offices.

8. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be set when the timetable for consultation of the Regional Spatial Strategy is known.