

# Devon Rural Network Steering Group Minutes

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2005, English Nature Offices, Exeter. 9.30am

## Present

Prof Michael Winter	University of Exeter, Chair of DRN	Dominic Acland	Torbay Coast & Countryside Trust
Dr Sue Brownlow	SW RDA	Mike Ellingham	National Farmers Union
Gordon Cleaver	Mid-Devon District Council	Peter Harvey	Business Link Devon & Cornwall
Phil Collins	English Nature	Richard White	Culm Grassland
Philip Wagstaff	Okehampton MCTi / Faith Groups		
Steve Pitcher	North Devon District Council		
David Incoll	DC Chief Executives Group and WDBC	Pauline Warner	Devon County Council - Speaker
Mark Blacksell	Emeritus Professor of Plymouth University	David Fletcher	GOSW - speaker
Peter Harding	Community Council of Devon	Heather Hillman	DRN Manager
Andrew Lightfoot	Devon County Council	Lisa Henry	DRN Officer
Tom Langdon-Davis	Devon Towns Forum	Sarah Streeter	DRN Assistant

## Apologies

Geoff Bateman	Environment Agency
Prof Ian Mercer	South West Forest - Vice Chair DRN
Sue Smith	Economy and Regeneration DCC
David Whitely	NW Devon Economic Partnership / Regeneration Co
Chris Woodruff	East Devon AONB Partnership
Peter Walmsley	Rural Business Support Action Group & Exeter and Heart of Devon Partnership, Private Sector

## 1. Introductions to new DRN Staff.

In addition to the new members of DRN staff: Lisa Henry, DRN Officer and Sarah Streeter, DRN Assistant there were other new faces round the table, Michael Winter asked that everyone introduce themselves.

Michael W thanked Phil C for hosting the meeting.

Michael W asked that as David Fletcher was presenting and then leaving the meeting he proposed to take the agenda in a revised order and come back to the minutes and matters arising from the last meeting.

## 2. GOSW presentation.

David Fletcher thanked the DRN for the opportunity to update the steering group on developments regarding Rural Delivery.

The Government Offices for the Regions have been tasked by central Government to develop a Regional Rural Delivery Framework. The framework is not designed to prescribe actions, or duplicate other strategies but to support and assist where there are gaps.

The GOSW have consulted on the issues and have taken the temperature in the region for change and the level of integration that would be acceptable. (Copy of David's presentation to be sent out with the minutes)

Michael Winter thanked David F for his presentation and opened it up to the floor for discussion. The main areas discussed were:

- The pace of change on the Modernising Rural Delivery Agenda seems to have slowed – it was pointed out that whilst from an external perspective this may be so, there is a great deal of work taking place and the proposed date for the official investiture of the new agencies being created through the bill has been brought forward to October 2006.
- David F was asked if the new framework would offer projections of what the rural/ farmed landscape might look like in the future and how the framework will be monitored– the framework does not articulate visions or targets but reflects aspirations, it is considered to be the glue between other strategies.

Monitoring in a simple form will be through the simplification of the process, and making the most of other mainstream delivery and service as a vehicle.

- One option for simplifying processes is the use of the Local Area Agreement's - whilst this was generally agreed as an interesting pilot it was noted that DEFRA money had not been included in the current pilot scheme but they would look at it on a case by case basis. Currently in the LAA arrangement regeneration is not a block, but is a cross-cutting element linking the three blocks of: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; and healthier and older people together. Andrew L suggested that the integration of regeneration could be an interesting topic for consideration at a future meeting.
- An update on the Dorset Pathfinder was requested – David F noted that the formal process was complete with John Prescott having signed off on the pilot. They have identified four key areas of work to concentrate on. Namely: simpler and quicker access to funding for rural businesses and communities; more effective and simpler rural partnership structures that take an integrated approach to policy and delivery; connecting rural delivery to community planning; and addressing the distinctive coastal and marine issues. It was suggested and agreed that we ask a member of the team to make a presentation to the steering group in the future.

**Action – request a member of the Dorset Pathfinder team to make a presentation to the steering group in the future.**

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising.**

*Previous Action: Michael W to talk to Colin Molton about offering the DRN as a vehicle for co-ordinating the measures and organisations involved in the development and implementation of the Rural Delivery Strategy.* – a meeting has taken place and the RDA are considering this option.

*Previous Action: Sue S to ask Bob Dow (BusinessLink Devon and Cornwall) if BusinessLink are now part of the RDA, and how this may affect funding through the DRN RR SERC money.* – Sue S has sent apologies for this meeting so it wasn't clear whether action has been taken.

*Previous Action: Michael W to contact Colin Molton and DEFRA about where additional funding could be found for the new and existing SW Forest programmes and to say how important these programmes are* – a meeting is being brokered to look at the issues.

*Previous Action: Develop and publicise a new membership structure based on full and associate memberships, with no concessions to those organisations with paid staff* – Lisa H to complete this by the next meeting.

All other actions are complete or arising under agenda items.

### **4. Presentation from Pauline Warner, DCC on Regional Spatial Strategy.**

Pauline W works in Spatial Planning in the Environment Directorate of DCC and is currently working alongside the Regional Assembly (RA) in the development of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). This is being developed as a result of changes to the planning system. The RSS sets out regional issues, and is thematic in style, considering activities and movement, in comparison to previous County Structure Plans that were geographical, land use based. The RSS will be underpinned by Local Development Frameworks, which will contain much of the specific policies for land use and development in District Council areas. The RSS will also have a Delivery Plan of sorts, with an annual monitoring report.

The RSS will be submitted in draft at the end of the year and be followed by a 3 month consultation period. More stakeholder events are planned July/ August.

DCC have to advise the Regional Assembly (RA) by the beginning of September - a revision to the previous date, affording DRN more time to input if desired. A key issue that has been raised is the need to bring the rural hinterland into the core of the urban regeneration agenda. The RA has done work on the functions of settlements within towns and villages. This research is available on the RA website: [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk) .

Currently the response to the RA from DCC is going to take the form of advocating an integrated approach to the 3 pillars of sustainability, recognition of the diversity of settlements, community planning, and a balance

of development, identification of the need for affordable housing, regard for the high quality environment, the green infrastructure and rural proofing.

Michael W thanked Pauline W for her input and reminded everyone that there was a regional consultation event coming up on July 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss the rural implications for the RSS. It was also proposed that the DRN should make a submission to DCC prior to the advice being given to the RA.

Sue B noted that this timetable now matches closely the review of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) all the details of this are on their website [www.southwesteda.org.uk](http://www.southwesteda.org.uk). With respect to RSS from the RDA's perspective Sue B noted that it is important that the DRN takes note of the Exeter Urban Area, in particular with respect to the need for housing development to keep pace with the anticipated economic growth of the Principal Urban Areas (PUA's). This heightens the importance of the rural – urban debate.

David I noted that the DRN should be looking at the wider Devon issue of getting people and places working, without focussing in on the impact of the PUA's. Michael W concurred with this viewpoint.

Tom L-D pointed to the MCTi plans as sources of information at a local level, and whilst this hasn't been disseminated widely at Regional level, work has been undertaken across Devon to assimilate common themes.

Steve P agreed that the DRN should respond to the DCC in advance of its advice being given to the RA, asserting the needs and complexities of the rural picture.

**Action – Lisa H to arrange a meeting of Consultation Response (rural proofing) group to look at the RSS**

## **5. University of Birmingham study on Community Capacity in rural areas.**

Michael W has been approached by the University of Birmingham (Mike Smith) requesting to use the Devon Rural Network as a case study area for their work on Community Capacity. It is proposed to have a workshop in September and for the DRN to continue as an advisory forum. There is a possibility that this could be incorporated into the DRN Summer Event.

A short paper was circulated for information and it was proposed that a sensible solution might be to have a separate meeting with them, either before or after a steering group meeting.

Peter Harding also noted that the CCD is also working with them on this.

**Action – Michael W to inform the University of Birmingham that the DRN is happy to be involved.**

## **6. Rural Renaissance.**

DRN had its bilateral meeting with the RDA on 16<sup>th</sup> May regarding new money available this year. The RDA had met with other RR partnerships and identified a need for the DRN and Devon Renaissance to grow their relationship in recognition that there will be further funding opportunities. Both the DRN and Devon Renaissance have proposed ideas for projects that can be delivered within the timescale.

With regard to the Project Outline Proposal (POP) – notes of this meeting had been circulated, and Heather H highlighted the main points, namely:

- Need to clarify links in the POP to the Devon Rural Strategy
- Need to clarify links in the POP to other strategic documents
- More work needs to be done as the POP goes straight to delivery plan, with no interim process
- Concern was raised over the emphasis on sustainable food and farming and sustainable tourism, and a lack of mention of the emerging industries as a result of the development of the Exeter economic area
- Whilst the POP was seen to include an innovative, complementary package of strategic projects, the RDA would like a higher degree of flexibility beyond the initial delivery plan.
- Concern that state aid had not been discussed – Heather H admitted that this had not yet been addressed at the outline proposal stage as it was initially thought that the POP was just an outline.
- There was some confusion over terminology for example themes versus sectors and what is meant by leisure infrastructure.
- Further development of the structures and accountable body is required

The RDA has offered the assistance of a consultant, Nick Jones to assist in the revision of the POP and the delivery plan phase, for which the DRN is very grateful. He is due to begin working with Heather H next week. It is important however that the POP continues to be owned by the DRN and once a revision is near completion a meeting needs to be convened to include Nick Jones. .

In terms of the structures and accountable body – this is a case of assessing options available and making the most sensible decision.

Sue B noted that the circulated minutes were notes of a very in-depth meeting and the overall feeling is positive and the steering group should not be disheartened by the need for minor revisions to the POP to be completed.

Timescales were discussed and it was agreed that the POP revision should be a matter of weeks, with the overall delivery plan and processes in place by the end of the calendar year. Whilst this might sound a long way off, it should be realistic.

Michael W is attending a meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June to discuss a ‘road map’ for the potential future merger of Devon Renaissance and DRN. There needs to be a sensible delivery mechanism for rural Devon and this is the first stage in this discussion process. Others attending this meeting include: Sue B, Sue Smith, David Incoll, Pete Tansey, and Colin Molton.

It was agreed that Michael W should invite Pete Tansey to the next DRN steering group meeting as a new member.

**Action – HH / LH to convene a meeting of RRAG when the POP has been revised to ensure DRN ownership**

## **7. Short updates on practical issues.**

### **7.1 Sustainable Farming and Food Action Group**

The SFFAG met recently and discussed the progress on Rural Renaissance; they made some suggestions to the RRAG, namely:

- If the RDA are supportive of the POP to organise the Summer Event around a project development theme
- Launch and publicise the mechanism for bringing project partnerships together – the aims of each project, the funding that will be available from the SERC fund and how much match is required, to ensure project partners fully understand the opportunities and commitment levels involved
- Prepare an appraisal mechanism that utilises member’s expertise within the Action Groups, to support the overall appraisal by the RRAG, however need clarity on the expected input from the Action Groups in this process to manage time effectively (NB: the RR appraisal mechanism is set by SWRDA, however the groups could input into eligibility criteria for projects)
- Requirement to have a facilitator role to bring together and assist partnerships for project delivery
- Need to reassert the role of the DRN, achievements so far, and stress the fact that the SERC is an opportunity, but not the sole purpose of the DRN.

It was agreed that the Action Groups are encouraged to develop their roles outside of RR.

With respect to this the SFFAG have tried to revise their Action Plan into some key specific actions that can be achieved this financial year. In particular local food procurement by the public sector, especially schools, and a media based consumer awareness campaign on local food. They continue to develop the group, Taste of the West are interested in being involved, which should be a positive link.

David I agreed that the lobby role was important and suggested that the MOD could be another good target as they have such a large presence in the County. HH pointed out that headed paper would be available soon and it was agreed that any lobbying by action groups would be signed off by the steering group and go out in Michael W’s name.

### **7.2 Sustainable Tourism Action Group**

Lisa H noted that the STAG was not as developed as the SFFAG and was holding a wider meeting on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> June to agree some principal areas of work that should be the focus of the STAG and form a core Action Group. There should be further news on this at the next meeting.

### **7.3 Website Update**

The website is currently being populated with information. Lisa H requested news and events stories that can be uploaded so that the site is busy when launched at the end of June. Lisa H circulated screen shots of the different sections to demonstrate the banner pictures and the types of information that would be available. It was noted that all members would be issued with a username and password in the future to enable members to submit their own news and events, although they would need to be authorised by the administrator before going live.

### **7.4 Common Ground Partnership**

Heather H circulated the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the newly reformed Common Ground Partnership. Whilst it was considered that much of the work was of interest to the DRN caution was noted about getting too involved with smaller working groups and spreading ourselves too thinly.

### **7.5 Leicestershire Rural Partnership**

The DRN has been invited to attend and participate in a conference being held by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership in July. It was considered a good opportunity to fact find about best practice and learn lessons as they have been in existence for over ten years.

### **7.6 Summer Event**

At a previous meeting it had been suggested that we should invite Lord Haskins to attend, however this was not now considered to be pertinent as he is not so actively involved. Michael W is due to meet with MP Jim Knight and it was considered opportune to ask if he might be able to come. It was decided to await his response before agreeing a date.

Ideas for the programme were sought:

RR delivery plan was suggested and agreed although caution noted over managing expectations

MCTi themes and plans

Regional Spatial Strategy

Heather requested suggestions of a venue (remembering value for money, and the availability of a local lunch), and proposed that she puts together a draft programme to be circulated for comment.

***Action – Michael W to get some dates for September 05 from Jim Knight***

***Action – DRN team to put together draft programme for circulation***

***Action – All to contact DRN to suggest potential venues***

### **7.7 Private Sector representation**

Heather noted that there were steering group members who would prefer meetings to be scheduled early morning or late afternoon, as they currently find attendance difficult. This is particularly so with private sector members who have businesses to run.

***Action - to try the next meeting at 4-6pm.***

### **7.8 Merger of Agencies in North Devon**

Steve P highlighted that the North Devon Marketing Bureau, the North Devon Economy and Regeneration Company and the Enterprise Agency are looking to merge and form a new body. Steve P offered to present this idea and process to the group at a future meeting.

### **7.9 National Energy Association**

Lisa H noted for information that the DRN had been requested by the National Energy Association to email our members regarding the recruitment of Rural Energy Champions.

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

Monday August 1<sup>st</sup> 4pm. Venue tbc.