

Devon Rural Network Steering Group Minutes

4.00pm on Monday 1st August, Council Chamber, West Devon BC Offices, Okehampton.

Present

Prof Michael Winter	University of Exeter, Chair of DRN	Lynne del Greco	South West RDA
Prof Ian Mercer	South West Forest, Vice DRN Chair	Mark Blacksell	University of Plymouth
Chris Woodruff	East Devon AONB	Peter Walmsley	Private Sector
Philip Collins	English Nature	Richard White	Devon Wildlife Trust
Martin Weiler	Environment Agency	Sue Smith	Devon County Council
Tom Langdon Davis	Devon Towns Forum	Heather Hillman	DRN Manager
Mike Ellingham	National Farmers Union	Lisa Henry	DRN Officer
David Incoll	Devon CEX's group	Sarah Streeter	DRN Assistant
Peter Harvey	Business Link Devon & Cornwall		
Peter Harding	Community Council of Devon		
Philip Wagstaff	Faith Groups		

Apologies

Gordon Cleaver	Devon Towns Forum
David Whitely	North West Devon Economic Partnership
Steve Pitcher	North Devon District Council
Dominic Acland	Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust #
Ian Tearle	South West NHS Trust

Introduction and welcome by Chairman, everyone introduced themselves around the table.

1. Minutes of the last Meeting (7/06.05)

Comments and Corrections –

- **Previous Action - to request a member of Dorset Pathfinder to make a presentation to the Steering Group - not yet completed**
- **Previous Action - Lisa Henry to arrange meeting of Consultation Response group re RSS. - Meeting arranged for 3.08.05**
- **Previous Action - Michael Winter (MW) to inform the University of Birmingham that the DRN is happy to be involved – Actioned**
- **Previous Action – Summer Event Organisation - Summer Event Actions covered later in meeting**

2. Rural Renaissance Update

- There has been slow progress with the POP due to annual leave. There have been a number of revisions by Nick Jones to date and there will be a catch up meeting between RDA and DRN on 5.08.05.
- TLD raised the concern over the possibility of problems between the RDA and DRN due to different terms and references used in the POP– there was a need to 'leave no stone unturned' regarding definitions and perceptions so as to avoid confusion between the 2 groups. HH voiced concerns over the bid losing focus.

ACTION – HH to email finalised POP to all Steering Group Members prior to submission to SWRDA

3. Devon Rural Delivery Road Map

- A meeting took place on 20.06.05 between Devon Renaissance, RDA, DRN, GOSW and DCC in order to deal with the uncertainty over the operational principals of DRN and Devon Renaissance. There has been some confusion over the roles of these two bodies in terms of strategic, policy and project delivery.

- The key role for DRN should be as overarching partnership, overseeing the RR delivery process including the allocation of funds and recommendations by DR.
- Devon Renaissance's role should be to deal with the appraisal and monitoring of project development within Devon. At present the system that Devon Renaissance has to do this is well established and there is no need to duplicate it within DRN. There is scope to extend Devon Renaissance's role to cover the whole of Devon.
- The next steps are to finalise the detail and operationalising of both groups to clarify individual roles. The 2003 Rural Strategy also needs 'refreshing'. Following this a review of the membership and structure of DRN and DR will be initiated to make sure they are both fit for purpose.
- MW added that we need to aim for a merger between Rural Renaissance and Devon Renaissance in the future. However for a time being there may be a need to have a 2 pronged approach to Rural Renaissance delivery in Devon until issues such as a single accountable body etc. are resolved to the satisfaction of partners.
- There also needs to be a refreshing of the Steering group meetings in the future, focusing on where we are in terms of our own strategy and action programme. There is a need to focus on the real issues facing rural Devon such as Rural Housing rather than just the wider strategic policy. HH pointed out that a conscious decision had been made by DRN in the past not to focus on the housing issue as it was not an area where it was felt DRN could add significant value. However lobbying and awareness was something the DRN could actively participate in on this issue.

ACTION – Next Steering Group Meeting to focus on the rural affordable housing issue. DI to invite Ruth Bagley and PHarding to invite Sue Southwall.

4. Devon Strategic Partnership

The DSP had its first meeting since its revision. Ian Mercer stated that the meeting was concerned more over the membership and government issues of the DSP, rather than wider DSPO issues. LH asked if reports from the component partnerships and organisations were given and IM indicated that they weren't.

5. Rural Futures Network representation and links

- HH had a meeting with Martyn Warren and Susie Bissel from the Rural Futures Unit at Plymouth University at the beginning of July. The Unit provides an academic view of rural issues through an established network and could provide reciprocal complimentary links with DRN. The Unit is helping to keep some of the work from Seal Hayne College alive since its closure, and also broaden and take forward its work.
- It was agreed that Martyn Warren should be invited to sit on the Steering Group as a representative of the University of Plymouth and Rural Futures Unit, - all agreed

ACTION – HH to Invite Martyn Warren to sit on the Steering Group as a representative of the University and the Rural Futures Unit.

6. Defra's – Rural Social and Community Programme

Paper Circulated prior to the Meeting

- As a result of the GOSW consultation event on the 21st of July to discuss the delivery of the Rural Social and Community Programme within the sub regions, it was recommended that the DRN should be the lead partnership for the Devon sub-region. It was recommended that it would be more appropriate for the money to come under DRN than the emerging Local Area Agreement, although both these bodies come under DSP ultimately. However, this may not be agreed by all partners, but the majority agreed that DRN is currently the best organisation to oversee delivery of the resources across Devon. In order for this to happen HH and DI are to draft a letter to GOSW to see if they are happy for DRN to be the lead partnership – if this is agreed then a consultation conference will be set up to decide how the money is spent.

ACTION – HH to draft letter to GOSW with regard to DRN becoming the lead partnership for the programme and organising a sub-regional consultation event. Agree with SS, PHarding and MW before sending.

ACTION – HH/LH to organise small email working group in response to this funding

7. Short Updates on Practical Issues

- **Summer Event**

Jim Knight is not likely to be available at this short notice for an autumn event – maybe book him in advance for the winter event. Other possible speakers include Stuart Burgess, John Varley, Lord Whitty or Ben Bradshaw?

HH indicated that a date needs to be set before any organisation can really begin in earnest!

ACTION – MW and DI to ask possible speakers for dates

- **DRN Website**

The Website went live at the end of July 05 to all members, but the official press release is going out later this week. The steering group were encouraged to send newsletters and events from themselves and their members in order to keep the site updated.

- **Sustainable Farming and Food Action Group**

Dominic Acland sent his apologies to the meeting, but there is the possibility of a local food event soon – HH will discuss with Kate Harris and Dominic and email further information.

- **Sustainable Tourism Action Group**

The STAG met in early July. Following a presentation on Cultural Tourism by Perfect Moment, the meeting centred on a discussion about terms of reference for the group and their role with regard to Rural Renaissance programmes.

- **Consultation Response (Rural Proofing) Action Group**

The 1st meeting of the CRAG will take place 03.08.05 at County Hall to discuss the process of rural proofing and the tools available for the task. Following a query from IM, it was agreed to discuss how to engage the wider DRN membership in consultations.

HH stated that it is hoped that over time the group will attract a range of people from different sectors and backgrounds to assist in rural proofing. The group will be concerned with rural issues in a strategic capacity rather than on a local project basis.

It was discussed that the title of the action group was a bit of a mouthful and it would be better to return to the original title of Rural Proofing Action Group, although as HH pointed out not everyone understands the phrase 'Rural Proofing'.

- **Rural Business Support Action Group**

Peter Walmsley has been asked to chair this group. Peter met with Graham Walker to discuss what is expected of this action group, and also with Nick Jones to discuss how this group fits in with the POP. The group has yet to really get going.

HH stated that an initial meeting was planned between PW, Graham Walker, HH and LH within the next 2 weeks to enable the DRN to provide the resources necessary to help facilitate the work of this group and the development of its terms of reference.

PH asked if there was a Business Link representative within this group, as maybe it would be a good idea.

ACTION – Peter Harvey to talk to Peter Walmsley about Business Links involvement with the RBSAG.

- **Leicestershire Rural Partnership**

The DRN was invited to attend at the LRP conference in July at Loughborough University. Included in the conference was an area for over 20 exhibitors with stands which worked well in conjunction with the day. The day consisted of 6 workshops at various times throughout the day, in which Lisa H presented twice.

It was apparent that there are some key differences in between the DRN and the LRP in the way that we work, mostly due to the fact that they have been around for over 10 years and are much more embedded in the County Council's activities. The LRP and DRN have agreed to keep in contact and liaise with each other in future.

- **Assembly of European Regions Conference (AER)**

The AER conference organisation is going well and Michael Winter has agreed to speak at the event. A representative from DEFRA is also invited as a speaker, though primarily the speakers will be from other European countries. Unfortunately there isn't the opportunity to invite the Steering Group to the conference as it is for members of the AER only.

8. AOB

MW made the suggestion that the next meeting should focus on the issue of Rural Housing following the labour manifesto pledge on affordable housing. The steering group should be action orientated and keep a watchful eye on the issue and contribute as they see fit. In response, HH recommended that during the next meeting there should also be a review of the DRN Action Programme. P Harding suggested that it may be an idea to invite Sue Southwell from the Rural Housing Partnership to the next meeting to do a presentation about rural housing. D Incoll recommended that Ruth Bagley should also be invited to the next meeting. In response to this, it was decided that the future meeting should be more of a seminar event for an open discussion about the relevant issues within Devon, the most important being rural housing.

ACTION – PH to approach Sue Southwell and DI to invite Ruth Bagley to the next Steering Group meeting to talk about the rural housing issue.

- 19th October there is the Community Council of Devon's conference on Parish Planning.

ACTION – PH to send details to SS so as to post the event on the website.

- PC updated on Natural England - it is forming in January and therefore at the moment they are in the process of defining and setting the structure for the organisation and the sub teams.
- CW updated that the 5 AONB's in Devon have just been awarded Sustainable Development Fund money, which will be around £100, 000 for each AONB.
- TLD updated on the activity of the Devon Towns Forum in organising the Legal Entities Conference which is the next in a series.

ACTION – SS to get details from Tom and put on the Website

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

12th October 2005. SG Meeting to be held first at 9.30 am followed by the rural housing 'mini seminar' at 11am at the West Devon Borough Council Offices in Okehamton. The seminar will be broken up by a buffet lunch kindly provided by WDBC and this may be followed later in the afternoon by the consultation event for the DERFA Rural Social and Community Programme.