

# Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes

10.30am Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April, Council Chamber, West Devon BC Offices, Okehampton

## Present

Prof Ian Mercer CBE (IM)	South West Forest, Vice DRN Chair	Martyn Warren (MW)	Rural Futures Unit
Tom Langdon Davis (TLD)	Devon Towns Forum	Steve Pitcher (SP)	NDDistrict Council
Martin Taylor (MT)	Devon Conservation Forum	Martin Weiler (MWEnv)	Environment Agency
Mary Talbot-Rosevear (MTR)	SFFAG	Charlie Plowden (CP)	ED District Council
Jay Talbot (JT)	Community Council of Devon	Philip Collins (PC)	English Nature
David Incoll (DI)	Devon CEX's group	Lisa Henry (LH)	DRN Co-ordinator
Philip Wagstaff (PW)	Churches Together in Devon	Sarah Streeter (SS)	DRN Project Worker
Peter Tansey (PT)	Devon Renaissance		
Cllr Humphrey Temperley (Cllr HT)	Devon County Council		
David Whitely (DW)	NW Devon Economic Partnership		

## Apologies

Prof Michael Winter OBE	University of Exeter
Peter Harvey	Business Link Devon & Cornwall
Peter Walmsley	Private Sector
Lynne Del Greco	South West RDA
Richard White	Culm Group
Chris Woodruff	East Devon AONB

Also in Attendance – Phil McVey (PMV) GOSW

## 1. Appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Devon Rural Network

1.1 Lisa Henry welcomed the group and thanked them all for coming. After the first DRN AGM held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, the first item was to formally elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman of the DRN.

Lisa invited the group to put forward their nominations.

Ian Mercer was unanimously suggested and was elected as the Chairman.

### Ian Mercer formally elected as DRN Chairman

1.2 The Chairman's first duty was to appoint a Vice Chairman. Nominations were opened up to the table. JT nominated David Incoll, seconded by TLD.

### David Incoll formally elected as DRN Vice-Chairman

## 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising.

2.1 In response to the last PSG meeting LH has drawn up a rapid response protocol document. The document is to be circulated to all members to the PSG for their response. (Attached)

2.2 At the last meeting it was suggested that Sheena Asthana be asked to join the PSG. After the resignation of Ian Tearle at the DRN AGM the PSG is missing a representative from the health sector. LH has spoken to Ian and he is going to raise the issue of a replacement on the DRN PSG at a Devon Health Meeting. LH is awaiting a response.

DI suggested that with the upcoming changes to the NHS and the likely introduction of a single PCT in Devon, it would be advisable to invite Sheena as an independent rural health voice onto the PSG as well as Ian Tearle's suggested replacement – All agreed.

**ACTION: LH to chase IT regarding a replacement**

**ACTION: LH to approach Sheena Asthana re joining the DRN PSG**

**The Minutes of the last meeting were signed off**

### **3. ERDP – Phil McVey GOSW**

Phil McVey was invited to do a short presentation on the forthcoming England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) Consultation and how DRN can best influence the Agenda.

Phil McVey has recently been appointed as the Deputy Director, Sustainability and Rural Affairs for GOSW. The post was created as GOSW realised they needed to increase engagement in the rurality and sustainability sectors. Phil has 2 main roles in his work:

1. An internal duty at GOSW – to aid his colleagues to gain a better understanding of rural issues which will help influence their work.
2. To give more visibility to rural partnerships regarding GOSW

#### **3.1 An overview of the process:**

The ERDP is a national consultation. For the South West, South West Core is co-ordinating a regional response along with other specific separate consultations.

The closing date for the consultation is the 22<sup>nd</sup> May though it may be likely that this date will slip back. The programme is due to begin in early 2007.

In this consultation, England is classed as the Region. Each English region is formulating a Regional Implementation Plan to set out how the region will carry out its share in the programme.

The RDA has formed a Steering Group with Natural England and other partners to discuss how we go forward with this plan within the South West. So far this Steering group has met twice, once in person and once via email. The Steering Group is supported by a drafting group to put together the Regional Implementation Plan (RIP).

The task for the Steering Group is to produce the RIP delivery plan within the 3 overall themes of the ERDP:

1. Enhancing the Environment and Countryside
2. Making Agriculture and Forestry more Competitive and Sustainable
3. Enhancing Opportunity in Rural Areas

The Group are seeking to identify the regional priorities for the ERDP in conjunction with other priorities already identified in other strategies. It is important that this programme does not duplicate other projects or 'reinvent the wheel' of other strategies. For this to be fully effective, firm stakeholder and partnership involvement is needed.

A communication strategy has been produced in order to engage stakeholders within the region – in particular during May and June of this year when there is a number of county shows. The use of networks is particularly important in this communication strategy, and the DRN has been identified as a specific target for engagement.

#### **3.2 Key Issues:**

- Cornwall – Should it be included within the region or as a separate region?
- The LEADER Approach – how does it apply to this programme?
- Funding – As yet it is unclear how much money there is for the region under this programme which makes the delivery planning process very difficult.

It is important that the programme is not a silo – to demand flexibility in the plan.

A key part of stakeholder's consultation is to question the priorities that are set out – in order to ensure that when the sum of money is set, the priorities fit the money allocated.

- Match funding and co-financing – A strategic investment is needed with the RIP rather than individual capital investment. Where will private sector co-financing come from? How much will DEFRA put in??

A discussion then ensued around the table concerning the process and issues of the ERDP in Devon.

**3.3 ACTION: Sarah to write up discussion main points and circulate to PSG separate to the minutes of the meeting.**

#### **4. AGM Feedback and Future Events**

4.1. The DRN held its first AGM on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March alongside its Spring Event. The AGM proved a very successful event and the majority of people agreed that it was a good idea to hold the AGM in conjunction with another event. It was noted though that the invitations are a very important part of the AGM process.

4.2 As a result of a discussion at the AGM, HT has taken measures to revive Devon Food Links. More information will be circulated when known.

4.3 It was suggested that the DRN hold a joint event with the Devon Towns Forum to discuss the links between Market and Coastal Towns and their hinterlands. LH proposed the meeting for September time – all agreed.

DI suggested that a topic to discuss at the event was the lack of clarity felt in certain areas as to whether the Market and Coastal Towns Association actually have any money to support the action plans of existing MCT's.

The hinterlands of Market and Coastal towns are an important catchment area; over 50% of residents in Devon live in MCTs and their hinterlands.

JT welcomed this event as there is a key relationship between MCTs and their hinterlands that needs to be more formally recognised.

***ACTION: LH/SS to start organising a joint DRN DTF event in September.***

#### **5. Rural Renaissance**

5.1 The RRAG held its last meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> April where LDG announced that the SERC POP had been given the approval by SWRDA and the offer letter would be released at the end of April. Robin Makeig Jones (RMK) delivered a presentation outlining the current working arrangements of the Devon Renaissance Programme. It was decided that this was to be the last meeting of the RRAG and that volunteers from the group and the DR Officer Working Group (OWG) would come together as a task and finish group to oversee the development of the Delivery Plan.

5.2 Questions were raised as to who is the accountable body for this programme and where the relationships lie between DRN, DCC, DR and the Reg Co.

PT clarified that the Reg co are the accountable body for Devon Renaissance and an SLA is already in existence between the two. Devon Renaissance is the most successful rural regeneration programme in the region.

LH stated that the more pressing issue was regarding the delivery plan rather than the clarifying who is the accountable body.

#### **6. DEFRA's Rural Social and Community Programme.**

6.1 The DRN are managing this programme on behalf of the Devon LAA. A memorandum of understanding (MoU circulated before the meeting) between DRN and the LAA has been produced to clarify the way of working.

The DRN serves to add value where it can. Within the RSCP the DRN is responsible for ensuring that this programme is delivered and that the funds are sensibly distributed across the county geographically.

The Chairman commented that the DRN does have to be careful in what it involves itself in – the more the DRN does outside of networking, the weaker the network might get!

***ACTION: PSG Members to read MoU and make any comments back to LH***

## **7. Rural Futures – Feedback (MW)**

7.1 The conference was a great success and was enjoyed by a good mix of people, practitioners, policy makers, academics, rural citizens, and both European and local people. It was a valued opportunity to talk to people involved in other areas of rural development and to share information.

The DRN's involvement was very important and worthwhile. The DRN organised a workshop and had a stand at the event actively publicising its work.

The Rural Futures Unit were very grateful for the RDA's and CRC subsidies that enabled local people to be involved in the conference.

MW thanked HT for suggesting Des Shadrick as the opening speaker for the conference.

A full report of the conference will be circulated shortly.

7.2 HT took the opportunity to ask if anyone had any ideas for places that Stuart Burgess chairman of CRC could visit when he is in the area.

***ACTION: Any Ideas of where Stuart Burgess can visit to be sent to HT***

***Action: MW to write a short article on the Rural Futures Conference for the DRN Newsletter***

## **8. Short Updates on Practical Issues**

### **8.1 SFFAG**

The last meeting of the SFFAG was on 27<sup>th</sup> February at Cockington Court, Torquay, which is part of the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust. Dominic Acland, the Group's Chair, declared he had decided to step down, as he felt he could not commit as much time to the SFFAG as he would like. He proposed Mary Talbot-Rosevear, Vice-chair, as his replacement, which was ratified by the group members.

Helen Thompson, Project Officer at SW Rural Enterprise Gateway (SWREG) attended by invitation to give the group an update about the organisation. The SWREG began in 2004 and operates across the whole of the South West. In each county there is a gateway officer and a project officer. The gateway provides information, advice and signposting to rural businesses via a telephone service and its website. The project officers work with groups of businesses, mostly farmers, and can provide small amounts of funding for training and group development. Many groups use the funding to buy in consultants or experts to help them with particular issues.

There are now 34 groups in Devon and there is still a lot of interest. However, the gateway has not been utilised as much as was originally envisaged and further marketing and promotion of this service is being carried out. There has also been some concern about whether farmers would use this type of advice service and also whether the signposting and referrals process was working. These issues are being addressed via additional surveying. An Exmoor Projects Officer has been appointed; as has a Fisheries Officer who will be working across the region.

MTR reminded the PSG that the SFFAG meets on a quarterly basis and works predominantly through the focus groups that were established in the latter quarter of 2005:

- Local Food
- Farm Waste Management,
- Renewable Energy
- Integrated Advice
- Role of Women

The **Local Food Focus Group** met on 8<sup>th</sup> February. The two main areas of discussion focused on the Real Food Campaign and the future of the Devon Food Links website. It was decided that the local food display boards that have been developed using RAFAEL funding could be used as a starting point for the key campaign messages, and that the first phase of the campaign should focus on schools and farmers markets.

***Action: MTR to circulate the 'Real Food' campaign project brief to PSG***

The future of the Devon Food Links (DFL) website has been uncertain for some time; but SFFAG members felt that it was a valuable resource and benefited many smaller food and drink businesses. Kate Harris has developed a brief for the new look website and is researching possible sources to provide the resources to operate it. It is intended that there will be four main elements to the site: ~

- Devon Food Finder – directory of businesses
- Local food activities table/list
- Business signposting service/facility
- Events, training opportunities and news.

#### 8.1.1 Farm Waste Management

Kate Harris has produced a briefing document on the new Regulations and the various companies that offer a recycling service for farm waste, which has been posted on the DRN website.

#### 8.1.2 Renewable Energy

Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) has received funding from the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Environment Agency to produce a countywide Biomass Opportunities Strategy. The strategy will focus on Miscanthus and wood fuel and identify suitable areas to develop small-scale local renewable heating systems.

#### 8.1.3 Integrated Advice

A meeting was held on 31<sup>st</sup> January at the SW Forest offices to kick off this piece of research. A group of 18 advisors attended and lengthy discussions produced some interesting conclusions. It is generally felt that there is a plethora of advice and that whilst cutting down on the amount of advisors would not be very easy to do, streamlining and integrating it is very important. There was a strong consensus that there should be closer links between the public and private sector and that funding driven targets can mean that the type and delivery of advice is not always exactly what businesses need.

The next stage is to set up meetings with groups of farmers to determine their perception of the advice on offer and whether they feel there are any overlaps or gaps in delivery.

#### 8.1.4 Role of Women

The Community Council of Devon is developing a new project, with funding from DCC and Devon Renaissance, researching opportunities for women and young people in farming families. A steering group has been set up to finalise the project brief and guide the delivery of the project. Further details will be available shortly.

#### 8.1.5 Other Updates

8.1.6 The Occombe Farm Project had its opening on 16<sup>th</sup> March. The farm aims to provide opportunities for learning about the principles of sustainable farming and has its own farm shop, nature trail, education, IT facilities and visitor centre. MTR said the Small Farms Association will be having its annual Farm Walk at Occombe on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> May, and extended an invitation to anyone who wanted to join the group.

#### 8.1.7 Bovine TB (bTB)

On 20<sup>th</sup> February, the South Hams Agricultural Forum (SHAF) and the Small Farms Association (SFA) held an informative meeting about the epidemiology of bTB in cattle and wildlife. MTR said over 70 people attended the event at which Dr John Gallagher, an independent consultant and expert of bTB, and a SVS veterinary were the principal speakers. The wildlife and environment lobby were approached but declined to provide representation. The feedback from the meeting was very encouraging, and it is hoped to organise more meetings that address the scientific facts of notifiable diseases on future schedules/programmes.

## 8.2 RBSAG & STAG

8.2.1. The RBSAG and STAG both met recently with RMK to discuss the RR delivery plan. Both groups were happy for Heather Hillman and RMK to take the delivery plan forward. Meetings between the groups will be scheduled by the end of May.

### **8.3 Consultation Response Action Group**

8.3.1 Since the withdrawal of Heather Hillman's secondment to DRN, Rural Proofing is now the responsibility of LH, though HH has agreed to stay on the CRAG. The calendar of consultations was circulated with the agenda.

8.3.2 The DRN is producing a co-ordinated response to the ERDP, while HH is co-ordinating a DCC response.

8.3.3 The Regional Spatial Strategy Consultation is due sometime between May and August.

8.3.4 Kate Harris is co-ordinating a response to the ERDP Uplands Rewards Structure. SP requested to be sent Kate's response.

**Action: SS to ask KH to send SP her response on the ERDP Uplands Rewards Structure.**

### **8.4 Proposed Rural Issues VCS Action Group.**

The paper attached sets out the next steps in response to the meeting held at Filleigh Village hall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February to discuss the proposal of setting up this group.

The group would be set up underneath the DRN and they would be the maintenance and facilitation body for the group. The Focus of the group will be on Rural VCS, encouraging them to engage with other rural networks. The biggest complication for this is distinguishing between those CVS groups that are rural and those who are more general.

PW noted that there was a great need for this group as there is growing angst among the CVS and networks which hopefully this group will help to solve.

### **8.5 Next Newsletter deadline and request for articles**

The Next DRN Newsletter is scheduled for publication on the **26<sup>th</sup> of May**. If anybody has any articles they would like to submit please can you send them to Sarah Streeter ([sarah.streeter@devon.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.streeter@devon.gov.uk)) no later than the **19<sup>th</sup> of May**. Pictures are always welcome!!!

### **8.6 Rural Innova – Component 3, Focus Groups**

The DRN are involved in the INTERREG IIIC Rural Innova Information Exchange Programme. The DRN have been asked to organise 2 focus groups each containing 3-5 representatives for the 7<sup>th</sup> of June from both Exogenous and Endogenous sectors.

If anyone would like to take part in these groups please can you let Sarah Streeter know? (Paper is attached)

Pete Tansey, Philip Collins, Tom Langdon-Davis and Mary Talbot Rosevear have already put their names forward.

## **9. AOB**

9.1 Lisa Henry will be leaving the DRN in July. The DRN Management Advisory Group has been put in charge of recruiting a replacement. The Chairman thanked Lisa for all her hard work over the past year and was sorry to see her go.

9.2 Sue Southwell has asked if there are any PSG members who would like to take on the role of judge in a Rural Housing competition (see paper attached). If anyone is interested please contact Sue Southwell directly.

9.3 The Chairman asked that for future PSG meetings we omit AOB at the end of the agenda. AOB will be replaced with “items brought forward to the chairman”. For future meetings, anyone who has an issue to raise at the meeting must inform the chairman before the meeting starts.

9.4 The Devon Rural Strategy has been revised is about to go out for consultation. Organisations should receive an email by the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. Hard copies of the consultation are due to go out by the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. The document will be available on the DRN website.  
Consultation responses should be sent to Sarah Streeter by either post or email by **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> of June.**

## **10. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

**The next meeting will be held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July at 2pm at West Devon Borough Council Offices in Okehampton.**