

Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes

2pm - 4pm Wednesday 7th February, Ockment Centre, Okehampton

Present

Prof Ian Mercer CBE (IM)	South West Forest, Vice DRN Chair	Phillip Collins (PC)	Natural England
David Incoll (DI)	Devon CEX's group	Pete Tansey (PT)	Devon Renaissance
Philip Wagstaff (PW)	Churches Together in Devon	Jay Talbot (JT)	CCD
Chris Woodruff (CW)	East Devon AONB	Steve Pitcher (SP)	North Devon DC
Paul Sadler (PS)	Environment Agency	Dennis Brewer (BD)	NFU
Charlie Plowden (CP)	East Devon DC	Mary Talbot Rosevear (MTR)	Small Farms Association
Martin Taylor (MT)	Devon Conservation Forum	Sarah Streeter (SS)	DRN
Sue Brownlow (SB)	SWRDA	Jennifer Anderton (JA)	DRN
Cllr Humphrey Temperley (HT)	DCC		

Apologies

Prof Michael Winter OBE	University of Exeter	Lynne Del Greco	SWRDA
Peter Walmsley	Private Sector	Tom Langdon-Davis	Devon Towns Forum
Peter Harvey	Business Link	Martyn Warren	Rural Futures Unit
Richard White	Culm Group		

Agenda

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

All agreed that the minutes were an accurate account of the last meeting. The minutes were signed off.

2. Matters to be brought forward at the Chairs Discretion.

3. Devon Rural Strategy

3.1 At the last PSG meeting all members were asked to comment on the priority issues table. All comments were incorporated. Once all the information was collated the table was too cumbersome and complicated. JA has reworked the table to a more user friendly structure, which was distributed to the group at the meeting.

3.2 Devon Renaissance had been waiting for the Strategy to be able to use it as guidance for projects applying for contributions from the SERC fund. The chairman proposed that DR be sent a copy of the latest draft with the obvious caveats. All agreed that this was acceptable.

ACTION: SS to send Devon Renaissance latest copy of the Strategy

3.3 Next Steps: Once the strategy is completed and printed it will be sent to member organisations and others check against their own work plans and consider the various actions needed from them. Organisations will be asked to take forward actions and interventions and take responsibility for measuring progress. Therefore all proposed actions need to have measurable and achievable targets.

The DRN will also produce a more detailed action plan for its own work programme. IT was suggested that DRN should target items that DRN can deliver within its capacity that are not being delivered elsewhere.

3.4 In order to produce the action programme we need to take stock of what is already going on in Devon. The group felt it would be a good idea to invite group representatives to run seminars on the five issues and the opportunities arising. Policy decisions can then be made around the outcome of these events, and a plenary session would be an ideal way of ensuring an outcome. It was suggested that this might be tried out at the seminar accompanying the AGM on the 11th April.

With 90 actions/measures the group discussed the idea of having a web based discussion forum though this would depend upon available resources.

The group briefly looked through the table (3.1 above) and made the following comments:

- 'Exception sites' be included under affordable housing as some DCs are not delivering on their targets yet. The Housing Corporation and the Regional Housing Body have come under a new joint management.
- The issue of Fuel Poverty also needs to be included within the strategy as it is a problem that is growing in rural areas.

4. DRN 2007-08 Budget and Priority Considerations

4.1 The Budget and a priority considerations paper were circulated to the group before the meeting started. In order to secure the DRN budget for 2007/08 DRN representatives had agreed to make a careful examination of the Network's function and effectiveness during that period. DCC have agreed the same financial and in kind support for the DRN in 2007/8 as 2006/7.

4.2 FUNCTIONS: The group were asked to examine the proposed paper for discussion and to see if anything was missing from the 'functions' of the network proposed. .

With regard to enrolment (function- e) the group proposed that one to one meetings take place with potential activators so the DRN can have a better overview of who is doing what and persuade others to enrol.

ACTION: It was agreed that during the year at least 2 of the functions of the Network for debate are on the agenda for each PSG meeting but that the order of those debates should be the reverse of that in the paper.

4.3 ACTION GROUPS: The action groups need to be reassessed to ensure they still fit with the priorities in the new Devon Rural Strategy. There might be groups already out there functioning that can be harnessed rather than duplicating with a new DRN group.

4.4 The group was asked whether if agreed with the proposed priorities. HT thought that a review of rural economic delivery needs to be conducted. Devon County Council and the DCs, except Exeter CC wish to work together in an improved 2 tier way, possibly becoming a pathfinder county for England. In late spring discussions will be taking place on this new 2 tier way of working – DRN should be included in this debate.

This will need an appropriate level of good rural policy guidance. HT asked if the DRN and the PSG can take on this advisory role particularly as DCC will lose advisory staff at least temporarily before 2007/8 begins. The districts would also be able to use DRN in this function to assist them feeding into the local government agenda.

The group agreed that Devon ought to try to be the lead rural county in England. Devon County Council needs provide rural leadership and joint working with the districts will give strength to that leadership. DRN is a great asset for Devon to have and it needs to be valued. WE need to recognise that the Network has to have some blurred edges as it encompasses many people from a great variety of organisations. The value of the Network is to keep them on the same side working for Rural Devon.

The chairman asked whether the PSG was happy to take on the role of policy advisor to local government for rural Devon. All agreed that the advisory role should be debated alongside the rural leadership question at the next meeting.

4.5 SWRDA has verbally confirmed that it will be contributing the agreed £30,000 to the DRN for 2007/08. DCC have confirmed their contribution and DI will be talking to the DCs regarding their continued contributions on the 9th Feb.

5. DRN links with Devon Economic Partnership

The DRN funding for 200/08 had been at risk from DCC budget cuts. It is proposed by DCC that there is a sharing of staff time between the DRN and the new Devon Economic Partnership (DEP). The DEP needs support and the organisation does involve the rural economy. It is proposed that DCC buy 1 or 2 days of DRN staff time a week to support the DEP – more than likely on marketing and communications. The chairman said that the dilemma was that the DRN needed two full time staff to run the network effectively (for cover alone) and yet the DEP had a real function in rural terms which DRN needed to sustain. The PSG will be kept informed of any changes regarding this issue.

6. Short Updates on Practical Issues

- **DEFRA RSCP**

The projects have just submitted their final financial claims for 2006/07. 2 projects showed an under spend – CCD Community Buildings and the Devon Rural Carers projects. Community Buildings is showing an under spend of £5000, while another CCD project is showing an overspend of £400. Therefore it was suggested and agreed that the Community Buildings project reallocate £400 to the Rural Volunteering project overspend, and £600 be reallocated to the Community Planning Database project. The remaining £4000 can be reallocated within the project or rolled over into Year 2. For Devon Rural Carers, it was proposed that their overspend of £1216 be reallocated so that £400 could be given to the Community Planning Database and the remaining £600 be rolled over into Year 2.

The PSG agreed this proposal.

On April 13th all the projects are required to submit their final Year 1 report. Some of the projects have requested that this deadline be put back slightly due to the end of the financial year and the Easter holiday being around that time. The PSG were asked if they would agree to put the deadline back to the 27th April.

All agreed.

- **Community Planning Database**

JA attended the last meeting on the 5th February. The Database project is still hoping for funding from Devon Renaissance but it is hoped that this will be resolved soon. In addition, the District Councils have offered in kind help to input data into the database. It will then be the role of the Market and Coastal Towns and Parish Plan organisations to keep the information up to date.

- **Action Group Updates**

SFFAG: Kate Harris, DCC Farming and Food Coordinator is leaving her post at the end of the month. MTR will be continuing the group in her absence. The structure and the membership of the group are currently being revised – though it is important that the group maintains its emphasis on farming. There is the possibility that the issues of forestry and environment will be dealt with over time with split groups.

STAG: The STAG is undergoing a reworking same as all the other action groups. In the next few months it is intended that the group become the Sustainable Tourism Advisory Group for the Devon Destination Management Organisation that is due to be launched in August.

RBSAG: This group was originally set up to deliver the SERC programme. Graham Walker is now retiring and there is an issue over private sector representation in the group.

CRAG: Philip Wagstaff is now the chair of the group as Ian Mercer requested to stand down. The group are also looking into their membership to try to ensure that a representative from the other action groups sits on the CRAG. The rural proofing model is currently being revised and JA is to run rural proofing workshops for Devon County employees in the near future.

RVAG: The new group is currently working well. The AG has a page on the DRN website where all information can be posted.

- DRN AGM 11th April

The original subject topic for the AGM was to be accessibility. It was decided by the PSG that a more pressing issue to concentrate on would be Housing and Climate change. Escot House near Ottery St Mary has been chosen as the venue for the day.

ACTION: PSG members to make recommendations to Sarah re AGM seminar topics in line with 3.4 above. The final decision will lie with the Chair.

- DRN Newsletter

The next edition of the newsletter is due for release at the end of February. The chair suggested that a digest of item 4 of these minutes might be drafted to go into the newsletter.

In conjunction – all PSG minutes can now be found on the PSG page of the DRN Website.

ACTION: SS to write a brief of the minutes to go into the newsletter.

7. Date and time of next meeting

2 future dates for meetings have been set:

20th March - 09.30am – 11.30am at Larkbeare House, Topsham Road, Exeter.

14th May – 2pm – 4pm at the Environment Agency, Exminster House, Miller Way, Exminster, EX6 8AS