

## Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2008, 10 am to 12 pm, Belstone Village Hall

### Present:

Philip Wagstaff (Chair)	Churches Together in Devon	Andrew Lightfoot	DCC/DEP
Dr Matt Lobley	University of Exeter	Chris France	Dartmoor NPA
Jay Talbot	Community Council for Devon	Lynn Thornton	DCC Transport
Jen Brogan	DRN	Pete Tansey	Devon Renaissance
Julia Page	Primary Care Trust	Tony Skeel	Learning Skills Council
Martin Taylor	Devon Conservation Forum	Charlie Plowden	East Devon DC
Stephen Bashford	South West RDA	Tom Langdon-Davis	Devon Towns Forum
Humphrey Temperley	Devon CC	Martyn Warren	University of Plymouth
Steve Pitcher	North Devon Council	Paul Sadler	Environment Agency
Leanne Crawford	DRN	Rob Hatt	South West RDA
Cllr Eric Ley	North Devon		

### Apologies:

Michael Cozens	South Hams DC	David Incoll	Devon CEX's Group
Jim Masters	Maritime Forum	Paul Gompertz	Devon Wildlife Trust
Anthony Rew	NFU	Emma Woodhouse	NFU
Sonia Thurley	Environment Agency	Mary Talbot Rosevear	Small Farms Association

### 1.0 Minutes of the last meeting 21<sup>st</sup> July 2008

Introductions were given round the table.

Minutes were agreed as accurate and signed off.

Point was raised about the file size of the agenda – this was due to the Devon brand template used

Requested that car share list included with agenda.

### 2.0 Matters arising

None

### 3.0 Matter brought forward at the chairs discretion

None

Feedback from the previous meeting with Stuart Burgess was requested. It was confirmed that the Rural Advocate was still in the process of designing the format of the inquiry upland communities (<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/events/ruraladvocatelaunchesinquiryintofutureforengland28099suplandcommunities>). At the DRN MAG meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> September it was agreed that Phil will maintain contact with Stuart Burgess.

It was confirmed that feedback on the DRN meeting with the Advocate from Michael Winter was also very positive.

### 4.0 Lessons from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Village Events – Jay Talbot

Jay gave an update on the ACRE focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Village concepts in 2007 and the events organised by CCD, including 'supporting our rural communities in challenging times' and the '21<sup>st</sup> Century Village Conference'. As a result of these events CCD had produced a report 'future of Devon's villages'.

A summary sheet was distributed (see attached) highlighting the common issues and the event looked at 3 key points – how solutions could be delivered at the community level; how to ensure the community is genuinely engaged; and how agencies could better work together.

Jay requested that the role of DRN for rural communities and the next steps for the CCD business plan form the basis for discussion.

Several points were raised during the resulting discussion, including:

- DRN to feed into suggestions for community boards etc as a mechanism to involve rural

communities in the Boundary Commission process. Also to look to other counties for examples, including the Blackdowns group Chaired by Heather Stallard

- There needs to be community input into Community Boards
- There is a difficulty in moving towards local level delivery without moving away from agencies – there needs to be more channels for engagement
- The PCT is already working in a cluster format to deliver some services, predominantly GP surgeries.
- Current good work need to be continued rather than reinventing the wheel, and surrounding rural parishes need to be considered, market towns are not the only focus
- Structures need to be right and activity will be dependant on funding. The DCLG has both urban and rural responsibility but the latter is not being translated as funding for Local Authorities – there has been an assumption that EU funding will pick this up
- There is a gulf between rhetoric and reality – Defra has not been strong enough in pushing the rural agenda forward
- Costs of living – there has been a huge impact on rural areas but has yet to filter into policy
- Environment Agency – working is beginning in December to create an evidence base for improving quality of life; agencies also need to be using the community planning database to learn and add value; boundaries between communities and agencies need to be blurred
- Funding – in the short term it is likely to be decreased. People need to be thinking how to access funds when the mainstream funds disappear and tie into the hub and anchor concept, i.e. making use of own resources
- The way communities feel after events such as post office closures and phone box removal, i.e. the loss of further services.

***Action: Consider how to look at community issues structurally – further discussion at a future meeting, and the development of a core working group of 6-7 members. Input from the wider group electronically***

## **5.0 Presentation on skills activities in Devon – Tony Skeel and Andrew Lightfoot**

Andrew gave a brief presentation on the Devon Economic Partnership (DEP) and highlighted the need for joined up thinking in times of less affluence whilst also retaining local identity in a wider context.

He focussed on the work through Productive Skills for Devon (PS4D) and its potential use as model of good practice, which is already used throughout the rest of the DEP work. The group had been operational for 4 years and was close to attracting nearly £1 million in funding.

The formation of the DEP was based on support from the RDA for Strategic Economic Partnerships; the Local Area Agreement; and support of groups, e.g. PS4D. The DEP has produced the Devon Economic Strategy, which highlights a small number of priorities which will have a wider impact collectively.

Tony gave a brief presentation on PS4D and distributed a summary copy of the group's delivery plan. He explained that PS4D was a top down response to Central Government priorities, and that the plan was a series of priority sets for different purposes but with common themes.

The future of the LSC was raised and confirmed that it would be replaced by a number of agencies by 2010. It was reiterated that there was a danger that the new funding agency will not have the capacity to continue the current face-to-face partnership work, i.e. the focus would be purely funding, not planning.

It was stated that the changing emphasis on upskilling of 'workless' would be more difficult in a rural context and with the current economic situation, with issues around retention aims etc.

Discussion within the group raised a number of points:

- There were three groups of people to consider – those to upskill; employers; and training providers. It was questioned on how the perceptions of these three groups differed, and the struggle for providers to full meet employer needs to due inflexibility in course provision
- Skills level across Devon varied greatly, and the reasons why need to be understood
- The Devon Renaissance Business Survey was cited as an example of good practice, and

- issues around lack of training planning despite awareness of importance were uncovered
- It was suggested that geographical evidence was as expected but was not entirely explained by delivery - i.e. some districts attracted more affluent and better educated 'outsiders'
  - Rural delivery can be more expensive and models such as Women and Micro enterprise (WAM) and Community Learning hosts should be used as exemplars of how local organisations and community groups could be used to delivery training, with some investment
  - It was cautioned that the use of statistics could be misleading and in seemingly more affluent areas there were indigenous populations and businesses who also had needs
  - Rural population will have different opportunities to urban populations

**Action: Feedback to Tony on the 5 Questions on the reverse of the handout**  
[tony.skeel@isc.gov.uk](mailto:tony.skeel@isc.gov.uk)

- ***How can support be developed to improve the skills of the workless in rural Devon?***
- ***How can we develop the voice of the rural employer within Employment and Skills Boards (ESB(s))?***
- ***How do we ensure that the skills needs of rural businesses are being addressed?***
- ***Are the skills needs of the rural economy different from more urban areas?***
- ***What does this partnership require to gain some assurance that rural challenges are being addressed through the delivery of skills?***

## 6.0 Research opportunities – Andrew Lightfoot

Andrew highlighted the potential for research to be commissioned against the 2 conflicting priorities of needing an evidence base and also the requirement for immediate action.

It was stated that Devon County Council had an annual contract with the Centre for Rural Policy Research and through the economic partnership there was a potential for more research through DRN, e.g. the impact of the effect of the credit crunch on rural communities, also the focus of the Rural Futures Unit conference in 2009.

A number of ideas were put forward, including:

- Discussion of livestock market redevelopment potential, i.e. Holsworthy and South Molton, specific work on role and wider impact
- Global impacts – 'credit crunch'; environment; protected landscapes
- Accessibility – test ideas and link to external work
- ICT investment – changes in economy and research (with outcome) on enablement etc, with use of county and global examples. Also tie into work on public sector procurement
- Transport and high fuel costs – more holistic research on how people use public transport and private cars, and how they could be used differently. Also consider access as well as transport and the impact on having to have own transport on quality of life. It was confirmed that there was currently a study in priority areas of North Devon and Ilfracombe on usage and travel patterns, as well as work on Tiverton Parkway station
- Reflection on the role of DRN and maintenance of challenges to all agencies on ensuring rural considerations
- Proving that higher unit costs for service delivery in rural areas is real and not based on assumption
- Productivity in the land based sector, also follow up work on what works and potential for improvement
- Protected landscapes and economy, i.e. work to help challenge the perceptions around constraint of planning restrictions in protected areas – current work by the RDA in Yorkshire and Humber could form a template
- Defra – studies on whether rural is better or worse off than urban areas
- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships - could be an effective way of tapping into funding and building into existing research, although an accountable body would be needed
- Food security – Defra team Food Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, focussing on natural assets

**Action: Further ideas to Jen or Andrew** [Andrew.lightfoot@devon.gov.uk](mailto:Andrew.lightfoot@devon.gov.uk)

## 7.0 Update on the RDPE – Rob Hatt

Rob gave a brief summary of the background to RDPE and the amounts allocated to each element of Axis 4.

He confirmed that some of the funds had already been committed:

- Agricultural resource management - £21 million allocated to energy, inorganic waste, and water usage; and dovetailed with Catchment Sensitive Farming
- There is an innovation fund for larger scale projects
- Livestock health and welfare – £12 million allocated for procurement and sector specific issues
- Sustainable Rural Tourism – work on the attractors, led by South West Tourism
- There is a ring fenced budget for livestock in National Park Authorities
- The programme is time limited until money available until march 2013 to be spent by December 2013
- It was suggested that a degree of clarification was needed on the programme and its administration
- It was stated and agreed that the programme needed greater promotion, with many groups unaware that they would already be able to access funding.
- Concerns were raised over match funding
- It was questioned whether the RDA would flag up gaps and anomalies in applications early enough to rectify
- Since the programme started in February 2008, only £2 million (out of a total £160 million) has been spent

## 8.0 ICT Strategy – John Baker DCC

John gave a background to the ICT project currently underway, including its current engagement of the food and drink sector to increase the use of ICT.

Work had been commissioned via the DEP Infrastructure task group to look at the adoption of ICT in Devon and its subsequent exploitation. The Strategy focuses on content, capability, leadership, and connection.

Consultation has shown that the Food & Drink sector is a poor adopter of ICT, but is keen to increase its usage. Step Ahead Research completed a benchmarking exercise which highlighted Food, Drink and Tourism sectors are priority.

It was stated that sectors need to use what is already available and there also needed to be more innovation in use. There was expected to be further work around 'not spots' with promotion of ICT hubs, flexible work space and business support, with Somerset cited as an example.

A feasibility study on the opportunities for Devon is to be commissioned.

**Action: Strategy will be available on [www.devoneconomy.co.uk](http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk) or electronically if requested. Feedback to John Baker [john.x.baker@devon.gov.uk](mailto:john.x.baker@devon.gov.uk), who will also circulate a link to good practice case study videos.**

## 9.0 Action Group Updates

Updates will be sent electronically

**Date next meeting: Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December, 10 am at Tedburn St Mary Village Hall**