

**Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes  
Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2009, 2pm, Ockment Centre, Okehampton**

**Present:**

Philip Wagstaff (Chair)	Churches Together in Devon	Jay Talbot	Community Council of Devon
Leanne Crawford	DRN	Pete Tansey	Devon Renaissance / BT
Mary Rosevear	Small Farms Association	Steve Pitcher	North Devon Council
Martyn Warren	University of Plymouth	Martin Taylor	Devon Conservation Forum
Richard Yarwood	University of Plymouth	Sonia Thurley	Environment Agency
Paul Gompertz	Devon Wildlife Trust	Jo Rumble	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Andrew Lightfoot	DCC	David Incoll	Devon Cex Group
Lucy Gough	DRN / DEP	Lynn Thornton	DCC / Community Transport
Ian Tearle (in part)	Devon PCT		

**Apologies:**

Charlie Plowden	East Devon District Council	Matt Lobley	University of Exeter
Paul Delahoy	Devon Towns Forum	Chris France	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Mary Ridgway	Devon Strategic Housing	Tony Skeel	Learning Skills Council
Tom Langdon-Davies	Devon Towns Forum	Jim Masters	Devon Maritime Forum
Vanessa Saunders	Torridge District Council	Julia Page	Devon PCT
Michael Cozens	West Devon Borough Council	Ian Mercer	Dartmoor Commoners Council

The chair welcomed the group and introductions were given around the table.

**1. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

The minutes from the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2008 were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising that were not already on the agenda.

**2. Matters brought forward at the chair's discretion**

• **Rural Health Strategy – Ian Tearle, Devon PCT**

Ian distributed a briefing paper to the group outlining the proposal by Devon PCT to produce a Rural Health Strategy for Devon. The main focus will be healthcare improvement and healthcare and treatment issues. The strategy will also give evidence of good practice, both locally and nationally, and give recommendations for actions and interventions in Devon.

Ian's team at the PCT will facilitate a small multi agency task group to complete this work. It is hoped that a draft will be ready for consultation by September 09, with a final version produced by December 09.

DRN were invited to endorse the proposal and to nominate representatives to be involved in the work.

There is no new funding available to act on this strategy, the PCT does have funding available to deal with inequalities though and this will provide evidence and recommendations for action and possible spending.

The Way Ahead – DCC and PCT strategy does not really mention rural issues at all so there is a gap for this piece of work to fill.

Lynn Thornton sits on the Rural Health Transport Forum – this group would need to be included, as would the Sustainable Travel Group. Often in rural areas it is not just about having available services, but also about ensuring they are accessible. Also this would tie in to Listening events that are being held for The Way Ahead.

**Action: The group agreed that they would be happy to endorse the proposal. If anyone is interested in participating in the task group then they should let Leanne or Lucy know.**

It was also suggested that the DRN be used to help gather examples of good practice from around the county.

**Action: Leanne / Lucy to send out a note to all DRN members.**

The group requested that Ian find out about the status of the overall strategic plan of the PCT as there was general uncertainty about whether it was in place yet.

**Action: Ian to let Leanne know the current status of the PCT strategic plan.**

- **Devon Renaissance Update – Pete Tansey**

After being set up 6 years ago to initially manage funds across Objective 2 areas, Devon Renaissance have evolved into an organisation with highly developed skills in fund, programme and project management. However, when the funding programme ended, it was necessary to review the organisation and its potential future function.

It has now been decided by the Board to relaunch the organisation. Some of their previous activity will continue, such as their support for the Greater Dartmoor and South Devon Coastal Local Action Groups (LAGs). They have already been approached by other LAGs in the South West for advice. It is envisaged that this will almost develop into a commercial enterprise.

There are still capacity issues within the organisation, and there is an internal restructure going on. The Board are conscious that they want to work with other organisations and not tread on anyone's toes. However, it is hoped that by using the knowledge and expertise already present within Devon Renaissance, they will be able to continue successfully helping rural Devon businesses.

The next Board meeting due on Thursday (14<sup>th</sup> May) at which the results of the latest business survey would be examined. This will give a good idea of how Devon Renaissance has been managing in the past.

**Action: Pete to let Leanne have a copy of the survey report / results for distribution to the group.**

Devon Renaissance will continue to exist in name, but with a slightly different remit. Phil Wagstaff continues to represent DRN on the Board.

### **3. Post Office Task Group Update**

The final report of the Task Group has now been completed and is available on the Devon County council website – link included below:

<http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/neighbourhoods-villages/postoffices.htm>

The group watched the DVD produced by the group, which is also available to watch on the Devon County Council website by following the link above. Leanne will soon have limited hard copies of the DVD available – please contact her if you would like one.

The report includes 10 recommendations, ranging from national to local level. One is for the Strategic Partnerships to take on a vigilance role of the Post Office situation. The DRN has been specifically recognised by the DSP and has been nominated to take responsibility for this role.

There was general discussion around the future of post offices, with a main problem being cited as the fact that the Government does not have a clear vision of what it wants the post office to be, so it is very difficult for the organisation to prosper in this context. There is to be a further review of staff, which may in turn affect post offices across Devon. However, the counterpoint to this is that there are now a number of successful community shops open, that are proving to be very resilient. This might be a solution.

The group agreed that there is a need to be proactive and prepared for more cuts. The post offices that are likely to be affected are known and should be supported to produce sustainable business plans. It was suggested that the next meeting of the group should focus on post offices with representatives from the Task Group and others invited to attend.

**Action: Leanne / Lucy to invite Post Office representatives to the next meeting of the group.**

There was also discussion around the creation of a People's Bank and local currency. Essex are reported to be creating their own bank – would this be possible in Devon and what actual effect could it have? The idea has been extensively discussed by the Devon Futures Group – it is important that the DRN remains up to date with the progress of this group.

**Action: Richard to look at available literature on these ideas and report back to the group.**

#### **4. Living Landscapes – Paul Gompertz, Devon Wildlife Trust**

Paul gave a PowerPoint presentation on Living Landscapes, which is a new and increasingly popular concept in conservation, focusing on ecosystem services as a whole. Rather than fighting individual battles, work is now being done on a landscape scale.

Paul's presentation will be made available on the DRN website.

Work is being done to restore Culm grassland in North Devon which is a very vulnerable landscape that used to cover the whole of the area, but now makes up just 1% of the land area. There are also important water quality gains to be made, as water is held in these areas, meaning that it needs less filtration when it reaches towns and cities.

The South West is the only region in the country to have a regional Nature Map, which identified where landscapes could be restored. All the Wildlife Trusts across the region are now engaged in this type of work, which is seen as being the way forward.

There was discussion around whether intangible economic benefits can be made more tangible. Could people make a living out of living landscapes? At the moment the progress of this idea is dependent on benevolent land owners. It is a psychological step for people to see their natural capital as part of their business. People still see the countryside as being free – it is the social dilemma about public goods. The concept of life systems could be a persuasive

The idea of water treatment in these areas could be a good economic driver. At the moment OFWAT will not approve investment in water treatment areas that they don't own, but this should hopefully be changing in July.

**Action: Paul to write an article on Living Landscapes for the next edition of Devon Rural Voice.**

#### **5. Future of the Network and Action Groups**

DRN has evolved and changed over time and it is useful to have periodic discussions about its direction and composition. We need to ensure that we are effectively engaged with all

relevant parties and that we have the tools to contribute / make decisions where appropriate. As a network, there are often not a lot of measurable outcomes and this often makes it difficult to obtain funding. However, there is a lot of expertise within the network and we need to look at how we engage with a wider audience and how future meetings / action groups are conducted. Also we will need to look at funding structures.

Consultation Response and Action Group (CRAG) – this group is to be reinvigorated following the relaunch of an updated rural proofing tool kit by the Government. Phil is attending a conference in London that is being run by the CRC and DEFRA at which the Government' commitment to rural proofing will be re-affirmed. Through Jay, Ian Williamson who is Head of Rural Mainstreaming and Rural Proofing at DEFRA, has heard about the DRN's intention to relaunch rural proofing and would be interested in using Devon as a good practice example for other areas.

Farming and Food Board – was set up following the merger of DCC Food and Farming Group and DRN Sustainable Farming and Food Reference Group. The first meeting was held in January and the group is currently being chaired by Mary Rosevear, assisted by Mary Quicke. The terms of reference from the group are nearly complete and a work plan has been set out. It is envisaged as a reference / advisory group for anyone in Devon with an interest in farming or food, including both farmers and environmentalists.

**Action: If you are interested in participating in this group, please contact Leanne.**

Rural Voluntary and Community Sector Action Group – there have been some delays as we were waiting for Devon Consortium to move forward with some of their issues. However, we need to get momentum of our own going. There is Lottery funding potentially available and stronger links are needed with the voluntary sector. There are regular meetings with the next one due in September and the group is chaired by Jay Talbot.

Sustainable Tourism Action Group – forms the sustainability arm of the DMO. They are an active group, which meets regularly with the next meeting in July.

## 6. 60 second news round up

- **Water Framework Directive – Sonia Thurley, Environment Agency**

The Environment Agencies consultation period for the River Basin plans ends soon on June 22nd. Everyone can feed in any comments/suggestions via our consultation pages [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd)

The main document (50 pages) summarises what is contained in the Annexes and what is happening in the South West. Alternatively you can use the Annexes to get to the areas that interest you most.

Annex B - To comment on a river or water body near you see actions by Catchment. There is a page for each water body specifying current status and any elements less than good

Annex C - Splits actions by Sector eg Agriculture

Annex D - Shows designations and protected area information including any actions associated with Natura 2000 sites.

There is also a companion website 'Our Rivers' set up by - WWF, RSPB, the Angling Trust and the Association of Rivers Trusts. If you prefer you can use this link for your comments <http://www.ourrivers.org.uk/>

- Jay Talbot has commissioned some research on deprivation in Devon by the Oxford Institute of Social Deprivation. He is happy to do a presentation on this at a future meeting.
- There are new Masters courses available at Plymouth University, which include focus on rural issues.  
**Action: Richard to send out a link**
- Reminder to all PSG members that DRN membership forms are due back. Please submit these as soon as possible if your organisation has not already done so.

## **7. Dates of future meetings**

- **Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2009 at 2pm, venue tbc – Focus on Post Offices**
- **Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009 at 2pm, venue tbc – Focus on Rural Tourism**

If anyone would like to volunteer to host one of the above meetings then please contact either Leanne or Lucy.