

## Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2007, 10am to 12.30 pm at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton

### Present:

Prof Ian Mercer	South West Forest, DRN Chair	Michael Cozens	South Hams DC
Jen Anderton	DRN	Pete Tansey	Devon Renaissance
Sue Smith	DCC	Dennis Brewer	NFU
Philip Wagstaff	Churches Together in Devon	Martin Taylor	Devon Conservation Forum
Tom Langdon-Davis	Devon Towns Fourm	Phil Markham	Dartmoor NPA
Steve Pitcher	North Devon DC	Prof Sheena Asthana	University of Plymouth
Emily Farrell	SWRDA	Dr Matt Lobley	University of Exeter
Mary Talbot-Rosevear	Small Farms Association	Matt Bell	DCC
Tony Skeel	Learning Skills Council	Leanne Crawford (Scribe)	DRN

### Apologies:

Jay Talbot	CCD	David Incoll	Devon CEX's Group
Peter Harvey	Business Link	Julia Page	Devon PCT
Prof Michael Winter	University of Exeter	Charlie Plowden	East Devon DC
Chris France	Dartmoor NPA	Richard White	Devon Wildlife Trust
Alan Robinson	South Hams DC	Phil Collins	Natural England
Martyn Warren	Rural Futures Unit	Paul Sadler	Environment Agency
Susie Bissell	Rural Futures Unit		

### 1.0 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

The Impacts of Foot & Mouth Disease were flagged up for discussion under Item 7.

### 2.0 Welcome to Tony Skeel, Learning and Skills Council

Tony introduced and welcomed to the group, along with Emily Farrell, who has replaced Lynne Del Greco as the SWRDA representative.

### 3.0 Presentation of the Community Planning Database (Matt Bell, DCC)

An update on progress was given, along with a brief background in Community Led Planning. There are currently 150 plans across Devon either in implementation or completion stages. Each plan needs a rigorous evidence base, and the database process involves and is led by the community. Steering groups have access to plans, but this is difficult for the wider Parish. The database is seen as a way of addressing this problem. The process started in October 2006 and has been key funded through Devon Renaissance, with additional support from the Devon Strategic Partnership. There have been a number of community consultations and events that have engaged with a large number of communities.

The database will allow communities to access information contained within plans and allow them to identify which actions have been taken forward. It will also be a useful tool for Economic Development Groups and skills outcomes. The Team are currently in the process of designing the actual database and comments are welcome.

#### **Action: Jen to circulate field input for comment**

There is also a website through CCD for further info [www.devonrcc.org.uk/page/community\\_planning\\_database.php](http://www.devonrcc.org.uk/page/community_planning_database.php), which also includes a demonstration of the database.

There is the potential for a South West wide version in the future.

The key reason for updating the database for communities is that agencies will be using the facility to provide evidence, including Local Authorities, Police Authority, Economic Partnership, Strategic Partnerships, and Health Agencies etc.

Geographically, there is a bias of parishes involved in North Devon and Torridge, as this has evolved from the Bridges Project, funded through the Countryside Agency, which is now coming to an end,

and tied into Parish Councils.

There will be a support network with a district structure of one or two main contacts in each area, with the team in DCC continuing in over all administration of the database. Parishes and communities not joined with CCD should still be able to access data; however this issue depends on the level of support offered by individual Parish Councils.

There has been a lot of research into main streaming outputs, and the database should also bring the community together to priorities issues and activity. The database will provide evidence for actual activity occurring in a community, assuming that the database will be used and updated regularly.

Potential for input of data is huge, for which the Community Planning Database team and the Economy team at DCC will take responsibility, and districts are also involved. Actual input should be down to towns or communities themselves, with DCC and district teams fulfilling a monitoring role. Although the database will ultimately be a public access facility, the database network will have editing rights on fields.

Three of the districts are not involved at this stage – Mid, East and Teignbridge. Teignbridge would have the greatest impacts as it has the greatest coverage. The Community Planning team has spoken with each of these districts; however they feel unable to commit to the project, for various reasons. It is hoped that they may come on board once the facility is fully set up and operational.

It is suggested that the database holds a 'government health warning' by clearly stating that Parish Plans have no statutory standing in planning and are often outside planning.

By not signing up to the database, local strategic partnerships will not be able to use the reporting facility of the database, although they will still be able to search the database. The Parishes in these districts are unlikely to receive the same level of support required to maintain their respective information.

The only data protection issue of the database would arise from people inputting personal information; however this can easily be overcome by addition of disclaimers and ensuring that users are aware that personal information could be accessible if required. There will be a secure login facility.

The data can be used as a monitoring facility to look at gaps in service provision and facilities. This can then be put to organisations and agencies to address. It will allow both the communities and Local Government to identify aspirations that have not been turned into actions.

**DRN's role can be to provide advocacy for use, within both organisations and communities.**

#### **4.0 Discussion on the future of DRN**

**- funding indications**

**- exit strategy**

**- lobbying support**

**- communications**

***See also Appendix I for briefing sheet on this agenda item***

The Network has been about communication rather than action to date and its nearest duplication is with CCD. If the CCD is doing its job properly, is there a need for DRN? It should be noted that CCD are community support based, whilst DRN offer support to organisations across all sectors. The Network was implemented by the Devon Strategic Partnership in the aftermath of Foot & Mouth disease, when it identified a lack of communication between FMD actors.

The rural agenda needs to be addressed in some way, particularly as the Regional Spatial Strategy highlights that rurality is effectively under attack. There is a need for rural parts of the county to recognise what DRN does, but the process needs to be reviewed.

A number of suggestions were made on the renewed direction of DRN, including:

4.1 Discussion group around service provision and delivery - there has been a large omission by the Network in this area so far. The Exeter Unitary bid will also have a huge impact here if it is

- successful
- 4.2 Debating forum
  - 4.3 Forum to shape thinking
  - 4.4 Rural proofing - It was confirmed that Matthew Taylor has been appointed to review land use in rural areas, and agreed that there is an acceptance that rural proofing is an essential tool.
  - 4.5 Climate change – adaptation as NW Europe is predicted to become one of the most favourable regions for production – ties in with retention of agricultural land and skills is essential
  - 4.6 Identification of gaps in funding allocation and projects
  - 4.7 Lobbying and reverse feedback
  - 4.8 Identification of mainstream issues that affect both rural and urban areas, DRN has yet to make an argument for issues such as education and social services. It should be noted that Devon PCT have been invited to join the PSG but were unable to attend this particular meeting
  - 4.9 Clarification of DRN's position in debates
  - 4.10 Greater engagement with larger mainstream organisations e.g. Commission for Rural Communities
  - 4.11 Reinstatement of function DRN should pursue
  - 4.12 DCC could use DRN as means of communication and evidence base
  - 4.13 Issues raised in the Devon Economic Partnership (DEP) Executive meeting – the Economic Strategy should make sufficient mention of rural issues, and could tie in with the Rural Strategy
  - 4.14 Action groups still need to be in existence, particularly CRAG and SFFAG. Others can be time limiting

In terms of the RSCP, DRN does not seem to have “banged the drum” enough. SPARSE is fulfilling a similar role to DRN but in the Halls of Westminster. Regionally GOSW, RDA, Ben Bradshaw and Matthew Taylor need to be made much more aware of DRN.

**Action: All PSG group need to actively contribute to Agenda and keep itself informed**

**Action: All PSG group need to flag up issues they wish DRN to address**

### Funding

Funding has so far relied on SWRDA and DCC but it is agreed there is no point in using this funding if there is no real need.

David Incoll has strongly advocated DRN to South Hams, but there needs to be a stronger network and purpose if Local Authorities are to continue to see the value in funding the Network. There is no guarantee of funding from South Hams, due to funding cuts, and it is suggested that DRN ties in with the LAA. There is a need to promote DRN to District Councils and demonstrate that DRN can become more effective in the future, particularly with officers relating to rural affairs.

The financial support currently offered by the RDA is sourced from a pot that will cease to exist after April 2008. This loss of funding will cause a large funding gap. The RDA have offered funds for Economic Partnerships, which may be an alternative possible route for funding, as DRN is already tied to the DEP.

Suggestions from DCC include:

- 4.15 The possibility of taking on part of the Economy Team's Funding Officer's role when the existing staff member becomes part time. This will be an advisory role only
- 4.16 DRN may link in better with Devon Towns Forum

It is generally agreed that if DRN take on other duties, it may not fulfil its own role effectively.

It is suggested that rural proofing could be offered on a consultancy basis to external agencies as a method of generating funds.

All agree that there is a place for DRN, but it needs to become more proactive and progress to the role of 'stropmy teenager'! Although the degree of sensitivity in terms of political involvement should be agreed. Rural proofing and debate are a critical part of the DRN process and should be developed further. The 'Voice of Rural Devon' needs to be pursued with increased upwards communication and downwards feedback.

## 5.0 DEFRA RSCP

DRN are in the process of writing to Defra Ministers with respect to the end of the programme in March 2008, as are several of the Districts, to show support for the RSCP and lobbying for its continuation. Jen Anderton and Jay Talbot attended an event in Bristol based on a national evaluation of the programme. DRN is now awaiting results of evaluation, but there is some indication that there will be financial support for affordable housing and rural community councils.

## 6.0 Short Updates

**RDPE** – DCC is directing support for RDPE through DRN and have asked DRN to act in a liaison role. DRN are working with the Dartmoor LAG, two other groups are Blackdown Hills, and North Devon. North Devon is much further ahead, but DRN are willing to provide support if needed.

**Sustainable Tourism Action Group (STAG)** – There is a workshop organised for the 8<sup>th</sup> October and it is intended that the STAG will become the sustainability arm for the Devon Destination Management Organisation (DMO)

**SFFAG** – Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> July to address and re-evaluate focus. The Terms of Reference have been changed and the group proposes to change its name, with the role of the group to be repositioned as an advisory one. This will be refined and brought to the PSG. The group is also looking at its structure and membership. Further meetings will be held in October and January.

Also discussed was the appointment of a consultant to identify and develop projects to bid in to the SERC fund managed by Devon Renaissance.

DCC are putting together a package of information for food and drink business support, including infrastructure and European funding.

**Environment Devon** – Richard White has stated he will be working on Lyme Regis and the Marine Bill over the coming months and will be unable to commit to ED. Another representative will need to be found.

The group met in July, with discussion around how ED will function in line with the emerging LAA and the Devon Strategic Partnership.

**CRAG** – the group are due to meet in October to rural proof the Devon Economic Strategy and Sustainable Community Strategy if it has been published for consultation. The group is in the process of developing itself further, including a suggestion for changing the name to reflect rural proofing role.

**Rural Business** – The group has been time limited but there is the possibility that its role in the future could be as a task group of the DEP. This proposal will be on the agenda for the next DEP meeting.

**Rural VCS group** – next meeting is in October

## 7.0 Any Other Business

### Foot and Mouth Disease

Feedback from North Devon has indicated an almost absolute loss of income both for farmers and those in haulage who deal specifically in livestock transport. A new license for movement to slaughter has been issued. All outbreaks so far have been traceable to the Egham area.

There is great concern as this is the main time of the year for farmers to increase cash flow for the rest of the year. This is particularly an issue for sheep breeders as rams cannot be moved except for slaughter and this will have a direct impact on next years lambing stock. There is a serious issue over cashflow.

**Action: DRN to write to Government and Financial Institutions to state farmers position – proposed targets include Ben Bradshaw, Bank Managers, RDA, which should be copied to ministers. Prof Ian Mercer and Dennis Brewer to collaborate.**

***Action: Replies to letters fed back to group***

There is currently no precedent of financial assistance to farmers under these circumstances, only flooding.

All FMD slaughtering has taken place at Frome, which has implications for the South West as livestock is currently being taken to Essex for slaughter.

The Commission for Rural Communities has recently been asked to prepare a paper in light of flooding and foot and mouth, through which the funding issue could be submitted.

Downstream impacts need to be considered and immediate traceability is a big issue.

***Action: Paper of the costs of FMD to be circulated (Dennis Brewer)***

***Action: Exeter University have released a Draft State of Farming report as part of ongoing work contracted by DCC. JA to circulate draft report around the group.***

A request was also received from Prof Sheena Asthana for information around rural proofing of Exeter and DCC work.

**8.0 Date of Next Meeting**

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November, with lunch, venue tbc

## **Appendix I – Synopsis: The Future of DRN**

### **Terms of Reference:**

The Purpose of the Network is to:

- To provide a coherent, united voice for rural Devon in order to:
  - highlight perceived priorities
  - provide lobbying potential and influencing messages as necessary
  - work to counter the effects of external policy which are inimical to Devon
- To lead and co-ordinate partnership working and engagement in rural Devon
- To take a strategic view of rural issues, expressing it through continual refinement of the Devon Rural Strategy
- To co-ordinate implementation of solutions to rural issues and maximise opportunities within rural areas and communities, as outlined in the DRN Action Programme

And to those ends:

- Support partnerships which benefit the rural community with information, advice and examples of good practice
- Maintain a County wide network of contacts and facilitate links with similar organisations elsewhere
- Collate and disseminate research and policy to members
- Form Action groups to implement the DRN Action Programme and other programmes as appropriate
- Provide a (Devonian) rural proofing process for all policy proposals affecting rural Devon
- Aim for subsidiary – encouraging action at the most appropriate level, and reducing duplication and competition to the minimum

### **The Future of DRN**

Through discussions at the Policy Steering Group of the DRN, the following points have been raised concerning the future direction and funding of DRN:

- Formation of a discussion group around service provision and delivery in a rural context
- Development of its position as a debating forum
- Continued development as a forum to shape thinking
- Rural proofing. The Network provides a valuable tool for continued proofing of policies and strategies, and this could provide income on a consultancy basis
- Climate change – adaptation and mitigation
- Identification of gaps in funding allocation and projects
- Continue in lobbying role and increase the level of reverse feedback
- Identification of mainstream issues that affect both rural and urban areas
- Clarification of DRN's position in debates. DRN needs to start taking a more active role
- Greater engagement with larger mainstream organisations e.g. Commission for Rural Communities
- Reinstatement of function DRN should pursue
- DRN could be used as a means of communication and evidence base for Local Authorities
- The Economic Strategy should make sufficient mention of rural issues, and could tie in with the Rural Strategy
- Action Groups should remain an essential element of DRN, particularly in terms of consultation response and sustainable farming and food

### **Proposals**

- Pressure to be placed 'on high' to express the need for a Rural Network, to include continued promotion
- Formation of links to mainstream organisations that will facilitate DRN's impact on Government, both regionally and centrally
- DRN to take a greater role in Local Area Agreements
- Greater inclusion of relevant rural based officers within District and Borough councils to ensure DRN's work remains relevant