

Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes

Monday 21st July 2008, 10 am to 12 pm, held at the High Moorland Business Centre, Princetown

Present:

Dr Matt Lobley	University of Exeter	Phil Markham (for C France)	Dartmoor NPA
Jay Talbot	Community Council for Devon	Lynn Thornton	DCC Transport
Jen Brogan	DRN	Pete Tansey	Devon Renaissance
Paul Gompertz	Devon Wildlife Trust	Tony Skeel	Learning Skills Council
Martin Taylor	Devon Conservation Forum	Philip Wagstaff	Churches Together in Devon
Charlie Plowden	East Devon DC	Prof Ian Mercer	South West Forest
Stephen Bashford	South West RDA	Tom Langdon-Davis	Devon Towns Forum
David Incoll	Devon CEX's Group	Humphrey Temperley	Devon CC
Mary Ridgway	DSHG	Steve Pitcher	North Devon Council
Emma Woodhouse	NFU	Alan Robinson	South Hams DC
Leanne Crawford	DRN	Andrew Lightfoot	DCC/DEP
David Rodda	Cornwall Agri-food Council	Sonia Thurley (for P Sadler)	Environment Agency
Patsy Temple	Primary Care Trust		

Apologies:

Michael Cozens	South Hams DC	Julia Page	Primary Care Trust
Paul Sadler	Environment Agency	Jim Masters	Maritime Forum
Martyn Warren	Rural Futures Unit	Chris France	Dartmoor NPA
Mel Hall	NFU		

1 Minutes of the last meeting

Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

All agreed the minutes were a true record.

2/3 Matter arising/Matters brought forward at the chair's discretion

None were brought forward.

4 Rural Housing Update – Mary Ridgeway

A paper giving a brief update had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Mary reported that rural housing has been included in the LAA as a local indicator as there is no national indicator specifically for rural affordable housing, however the delivery plan will cover all types of housing, but with various strands to cover each of these, including the promotion of rural affordable housing. There is a target to complete the high level delivery plan by end July.

The annual Forum of the Strategic Housing Partnership on 16th October will look predominantly at the delivery plan in terms of the LAA.

Action: Invitation given to those wishing to attend the forum, those interested to contact Jen in first instance

Baseline targets have been established on figures from past three years from 80 units per year to 100 units in year 1, 120 units in year 2, and 140 in year 3. These units will be both social rented and other forms of discounted housing, e.g. shared ownership. There is a need to think about tenure as well as number of units. The Rural Housing Enablers have conducted housing needs surveys and site identification. **Spreadsheets showing data collected is available from Mary if interested.** The Housing Corporation had a target of 1500 units over the whole of the South West over the next three years, although this has been increased to 2200.

The Partnership has built on the work of the pilot LAA, such as community land trusts, with two pilot projects earmarked for Torridge and Teignbridge. A toolkit for communities and planners for identifying sustainable settlements is under development.

There is still an opportunity to influence the detail of the delivery plan for those who wish to be involved. It was agreed that the delivery plan would need to be flexible in light of the current economic climate, especially in terms of exception sites.

Action: Those interested in the delivery plan to contact Jen in the first instance and documentation will be sent by Mary

It was confirmed that there may be difficulty in meeting targets due to the credit crunch and loss of contributions through S106, however there is a large resource within the Housing Associations that could be tapped, only these often only invest in housing and not sustainability.

It was stated that the delivery plan should tie in strongly to parish and local plans, and agreed that DRN should communicate this message upwards to the LAA. It was stated that the inclusion of rural affordable housing in the LAA has given greater clarity to the Rural Housing Enabler's role; however it would be essential for funding for these posts to continue.

David Rodda stated that the same issue were being faced in Cornwall, however there were some solutions, such as a new company Cloud9 eco buildings <http://www.cloudnine-living.com/> that can provide cheap sustainable units. It was stated that cost of units was not always the issue but levies, cost of land and associated infrastructure. It was questioned how developers were engaged with.

It was suggested that the Regional Infrastructure fund needs to be extended, with possible support from Government Office. It was also suggested that Alan Connett (Leader Teignbridge Council) is brought into discussion as Chair of the Rural Housing Board.

It was confirmed that Devon is one of the few counties that has rural affordable housing specified as an indicator.

Mary left the meeting

5 Presentation on Cornwall Agri-food Council (CAC) – David Rodda CAC <http://www.cornwallac.org/>

Jen gave an introduction to David's presentation and stated that a similar model was under consideration for Devon, and that questionnaires were being sent out for comment.

Action: Jen to forward questionnaire and strategic review to PSG

David gave a brief introduction to the background of the CAC which was initiated by Prince Charles in 1989 and started as the Cornwall Agricultural Group, which met quarterly. This developed with the Objective 1 programme, which looked to industry involvement for delivery. The Group became constituted and its Board were formed in 1999. A Cornwall specific strategy was devised and the group engaged with the Government Office (then MAFF) from the start. The group became the Cornwall Agricultural Council and developed a constitution and proposed a delivery team, which is now hosted by Cornwall County Council but steered by the Cornwall Agrifood Council.

The approach from the start was a partnership between the agricultural and food sectors and the local authorities/government. The CAC is apolitical and has an economic focus. Its Strategy was revised in 2003. Throughout the Objective 1 programme the CAC aimed to encourage projects into the programme, and from 2003 looked to engage with other sectors and economic partnerships. Their membership is now 90 individuals and organisations, who pay £25 per year. The group is full inclusive, the Board is elected with terms of office, and there is a constitution. The food industry has been involved from start and in 2007 the Cornwall Food Group and Cornwall Agricultural Council amalgamated into the Cornwall Agri-food Council. The council has a new Chair, Catherine Mead.

The Board is always looking at future issues and evolutions. The Objective 1 programme has now come to an end, and the team is funded to September 2008, but a bid will be put to RDPE to source continuation funding. David is also working with SWRDA to set up a similar group or council in every South West county.

The group is now looking at following the regional farming and food strategy "Changing Outlooks", with a Cornwall specific action plan, as the original Cornwall strategy is no longer relevant with the end of Objective 1. The CAC's primary aim is to add value and to get involved with the food industry and supply chain development.

It was questioned whether the geography of Devon hindered supply chain development or whether there was a lack of appetite for this style of working. It was agreed that there was a huge potential for cross border working and partnership between Devon & Cornwall. David reported that the CAC is currently undertaking further research and would be happy to share the results of this.

It was reported that DCC has commissioned some work on food infrastructure in 2007, and suggested that DRN could request for work to be commissioned from DCC to look into the issues raised at this meeting in greater detail.

It was agreed that tension in the industry between some sectors needed to be addressed, although some of these issues affected all sectors.

Alan Robinson reported that South Hams have previously run a project looking at demand and agency procurement, but that there was not much support at that time. It was questioned whether lessons could be learned from France in terms of supply chain management, and product and knowledge sharing, although agreed that France has a completely different industry (and support) structure and that co-operatives in the South West have been unsuccessful to date.

It was agreed that funding was there for cross border working but that politics could be the biggest barrier, and that in Devon there needed to be a shift from a “can’t do” culture to one of cooperation.

Patsy reported that the Primary Care Trust was about to publish an Obesity Strategy, which specifies local food links. It was reported that pilot projects have been underway in Cornwall to supply NHS meals which has had a great impact on the development of small businesses, although it was cautioned that the procurement process was a barrier to the involvement of many small businesses.

David was thanked for his presentation

6 Presentation on Stakeholder Jury – Dr Matt Lobley, CRPR

Handouts were distributed of the presentation (*see attached*)

A background of the event was given to the group, with an overview of expert witness statements, verdict, recommendations of the Jury and conclusions.

The full report of the event is available at

www.centres.ex.ac.uk/crpr/publications/pdfs/reports/stakeholder%20jury%20%20report%20FINAL%2009%2005%2008.pdf

Presentation Quality of Life and Upland Farming

Handouts of this presentation were distributed (*see attached*)

The slides showed the results of a farm survey conducted during winter 2006/7 and highlight the results of several points raised during the survey. For many of the questions asked, the results showed that there were no significant differences in the responses given by upland and lowland farmers, showing that perceptions on leisure time and holidays experienced by these two types of farmers were not born out.

The main difference highlighted was the response given by farmers when asked about whether they would like a successor, with lowland farmers much more likely to say yes.

Although the superficial results of the survey were relatively inconclusive, further analysis showed much more complex interaction, e.g. arable farmers are more likely to take holidays, whilst young dairy farmers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their situation, social life, amount of holidays taken etc.

Q&A

- Upland farming – the number of people on the land is rapidly falling and is likely to continue to do so. Food production and food security issues may see a return of more people to the land as alternative methods are sought
- Issues around migrant workers and health and safety – Devon needs to look at its future position and the current funding makes this an ideal time
- Climate change action plan is being developed for Cornwall, with an opportunity for cross county border working

- Environmental damage (e.g. soil impaction) through type and weight of equipment used – could this also have an impact on the amount of fuel needed

7 Action Group Update

Sustainable Farming and Food

The group held a strategic review in February; the report has been circulated to the SFFRG and other individuals around the county for consultation on whether the option of an agricultural council is viable and should be formed. Further updates will be given at the next PSG.

Sustainable Tourism

Jen is now the Chair of the group. STAG will be meeting end July to discuss the action plan, which will form the Sustainability Plan for Destination Devon. Three priorities from this will be agreed for immediate action.

Consultation Response

The group have responded to the Post Office consultation. The group have not met for a while though work has been carried out virtually. A new chair for the group is need – **A volunteer is required**. Rural proofing will become increasingly important.

Environment Devon

Paul Gompertz is looking to produce a manifesto for the group, and has also presented ideas to the Environmental Scrutiny and Strategy group.

Rural Voluntary and Community Sector

The group met on 18th July and looked at the organisational changes in the voluntary sector and the future of the RVCS Action Group in light of these, i.e. Devon Consortium. The Consortium has restructured with communities of interest groups, of which RVCS forms the rural arm. Concern over the Boundary Commission report was also discussed along with the concept of more local delivery through Community Boards, and how the voluntary sector and engage and influence these.

8 Round Table discussion

See separate note

Date of next meeting

10 am to 12 pm 8th October 2008 Belstone Village Hall