

Devon Rural Network Policy Steering Group Minutes

Friday 9th November 2007, 1 pm to 4.30 pm, NFU Offices, Pynes Hill, Exeter

Present:

Prof Ian Mercer	South West Forest, DRN Chair	Jay Talbot	Community Council for Devon
Jen Brogan	DRN	Pete Tansey	Devon Renaissance
Philip Wagstaff	Churches Together in Devon	Martin Taylor	Devon Conservation Forum
Tom Langdon-Davis	Devon Towns Fourm	Julia Page	Devon Primary Care Trust
Steve Pitcher	North Devon DC	Mary Ridgway	South Hams DC Housing
Dr Matt Lobley	University of Exeter	Charlie Plowden	East Devon DC
Mary Talbot-Rosevear	Small Farms Association	David Incoll	Devon CEX's Group
Tony Skeel	Learning Skills Council	Leanne Crawford (Scribe)	DRN
Martyn Warren	Rural Futures Unit	Patsy Temple	Devon Primary Care Trust
Cllr Humphrey Temperly	DCC		

Apologies:

Peter Harvey	Business Link	Chris France	Dartmoor NPA
Charlie Taylor	Devon Wildlife Trust	Prof Sheena Asthana	Plymouth University
Alan Robinson	South Hams DC	Denise Ramsey	Natural England
Paul Sadler	Environment Agency	Dennis Brewer/Mel Hall	NFU
Michael Cozens	South Hams DC	Emily Farrell	SWRDA

1.0 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the last meeting are agreed.

Matters Arising – Appendix I of the minutes hopefully reflects the currently agreed function of DRN and can be the basis of the Networks immediate work. The list of subjects needs debate and refinement as new things emerge.

Action: consider document and express views/comments by 16th November 2007

Introductions were given around the table for new members and the resignation of Dennis Brewer from the NFU and the PSG was reported to the group.

2.0 Presentation on DSHG Housing Strategy and links to LAA – Mary Ridgway, SHDC

Also see PowerPoint presentation (pdf format).

Devon Strategic Housing Group has been asked to work on proposals for affordable housing for the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The completion of the Housing Strategy is estimated for 16th November 2007.

The Medium Term Framework also encompasses Zero Carbon house design, and also considers incubator actions for the next LAA post 2011.

The five Strategic Actions have now been expanded to seven, with rural affordable housing being considered separately from general affordable housing, and the inclusion of Gypsy and Travellers as a separate outcome (for the present). These seven outcomes will last across the lifetime of the strategy, with three cross cutting areas – improving communication; better partnership working; and better use of funding. Two priority actions have been put under each outcome for proposed embedding in the LAA.

The Housing Group have carried out a problem tree analysis to look at causes and effects. There has been a very short timescale for the briefing document to inform discussions. There has also been difficulty around funding issues and timing. They are also looking at what the alternatives are but have no idea of timescales.

Potential pipeline of up to 70 homes is not necessarily looking at sites that have planning permission but have potential after housing needs survey. National Affordable Housing Programme has already gone above target.

There is currently no delivery plan that pulls the pieces across Devon together, however the LAA will provide the opportunity to pull these together in a much more informed way.

There are two priority actions in terms of rural housing:

- 1) secure support and continuations for rural enabling
- 2) a multi agency approach to developing a rural delivery plan – this can link into existing work of housing partnerships.

There should be a more strategic alignment and investment in resources, and will provide the opportunity for scoping work to access need and potential for rural housing. This should also link to objectives for improving the quality of housing design, and there is a need to promote excellence in design, especially in terms of sustainability. The LAA is providing an external push for this work.

There are three housing marketing areas based loosely on travel to work, and are North Peninsula, Plymouth, and Exeter & Torbay.

It is suggested that the rigidity of the planning process prevents people helping themselves, but Government Office should still be pressed to address the issue. There is still some useful work to be done around Devon resource for house builds, and local procurement, i.e. encouraging the use of local sustainable architects. The wording around this can be difficult to avoid cutting of all other option.

General discussion around Community Land Trusts suggested that DCC may be willing to dispose of some of its land for use by local communities for affordable housing, however it is agreed that local people do not always feel involved in the process. There needs to be a template or designed model to enable communities to go down their own route towards Community Land Trusts, although it is stated that the North Devon Scheme has achieved the same results without going down the Community Land Trust route.

Jay Talbot fed back on CCD's experience to date, and stated that insecurity in funding has meant that many good enablers have been lost in the past. Those currently employed by CCD are over achieving on targets, however 80% of the funding comes through the Defra RSCP programme which ends in March 2008. Targets are currently looking good with 60 units in development over the next 2 years.

It is agreed that the projected New Devon* figure of 70 homes over the next five years seems very low, however the group is reminded that there are houses already coming through the planning process. West Devon has 300 under development, whilst the role of Market Towns also needs to be a considered factor. Those under 3000 residents have been split out, however this does not mean that action is not continuing around regeneration of these areas. (*New Devon is the area covered by the 2 tier arrangement of DCC and the Districts and excluding Torbay and Plymouth)

Delivery of affordable housing will be through housing organisations, and there is also a central Government control process. There are issues around availability of land and the perception of how much land is being used for housing developments.

Action: Feedback on what the LAA group agrees about housing should come back to the PSG

Action: PSG members to comment of the work currently undertaken by the Devon Strategic Housing Group, particularly on whether the general direction of the work is correct and suggestions for how the PSG can be kept informed and input into the process. Please contact Mary Ridgway at mary.ridgway@southhams.gov.uk or Jen & Leanne who will pass comments on

Action: Drip feed to Mary Ridgway any evidence of housing need

3.0 Presentation on State of Agriculture Report – Dr Matt Lobley, CRR, University of Exeter

Also see PowerPoint presentation (pdf format).

Recent Agricultural Change information has been based on a survey of around 200 farmers. The 1.9% fall in labour masks a complicated mixture of the type of labour moving and lost – these figures are also in the context of salaried labours not farmers. The increase in managers is possibly tied in

with people moving and buying land and bringing managers with them or employing local farmers to manage the land on their behalf.

Recent agricultural changes in livestock show a reduction in dairy holdings nationally, however the decline has been slower in Devon. Although the number of holdings is decreasing, the size of herd is generally increasing. It should also be noted that some farms may stop dairy production but continue to farm. The livestock figures have been based on Defra data, through the June Agricultural Survey, which is a large sample, not a census.

Aggregate farm incomes figures are from a study conducted by Exeter University and Duchy College and it should be noted that information is based on the SW province not the SW region. Dairy is by far the biggest sector; therefore any reduction here will have a knock on effect elsewhere. It should be noted that the values will have changed this year, especially in arable production due to higher cereal prices.

Single Farm payments were introduced in 2005 and support payments will be redistributed according to size and history of the farm. There is a wide range of options for farmers to stay on the land, however the mental health aspect should be considered – there is a determination to succeed which may not be beneficial.

CAP reform is stimulating a new round of diversification and is also encouraging retirement in some cases. The impact of the reform is influenced by age and type of farmer, as people who are less dependant are less affected. Younger farmers often expand out of trouble and the dairy sector especially is being driven by young farmers willing to invest. This will be a continuing trend. Farmers are likely to become valued again for both food and fuel production.

Interesting ideas are now coming through SERC, with new crops and adaptation to climate change.

4.0 DRN Winter Seminar

This will focus on the land based sector in Devon and will ask the question “Can Devon’s land based sector make a carbon positive contribution”. It will take the format of a stake holder jury with expert witnesses and jurors.

Action: PSG members to consider names for witnesses, jurors etc. Please contact Jen or Matt mlobley@exeter.ac.uk for further information

5.0 Action Group Updates

SFFAG – Mary Talbot-Rosevear reported

Following a meeting on 9th November, SFFAG will now be known as Sustainable Farming & Food Reference Group (SSFRG). A number of work tasks have been highlighted by the group, including:

- Revisit material generated two years ago looking at local food and seasonality. The project is to be progressed on school involvement in line with “year of farming and food” initiative
- Look at disease management, with the possible development of a strategy for animal disease outbreaks in Devon
- Refresh of the DRN SFF action plan and link to regional plan
- Prioritise farming and food actions within the Rural Strategy

The latter two actions have been deferred for discussion at a workshop to be held in February.

CVS – Jay Talbot reported

A meeting was held on 4th October, with the working groups reporting back:

- The transport group will be looked at more widely and tie in with the access group work, especially with issues around transport to health
- Funding – there are strong issues relating to RSCP funding ending in March 2008. This will be looked at more closely
- Community Based Planning – parish and market towns are currently looking at an uncertain future
- Community Buildings – CCD is conducting a major 10 year survey
- Additional work to assist Devon Consortium
- Unitary Exeter and impact discussion, especially in the context of funding and resource implications

STAG – Jen Brogan reported

A workshop was held on 8th October, following on from a Destination Management workshop held during January 2007. The attendees looked at the role of sustainability in terms of the Devon Destination Management Organisation (DDMO) currently under development, and examined the strategic outcomes from the previous workshop. The end of the meeting was very confused but an agreement has been reached with STAG acting as the sustainability arm of the DMO. DRN will continue to facilitate STAG and is currently looking at membership.

CRAG – Phil Wagstaff reported

A letter has been sent to the Devon Economic Partnership with respect to the draft Economic Strategy. CRAG did not completely rural proof the draft as it was deemed inappropriate for this document, however the group will fully proof the accompanying Delivery Plan. CRAG has suggested the inclusion of “aspiration” in the vision, and that the rural aspect should be part of the whole document. The letter also mentioned broadband provision and speed; and stipulated a Devon wide as well as a SW approach.

Environment Devon – Jen Brogan reported

A meeting was held on 6th November, with discussion around how the group can move forward and areas to be considered. The group currently has a role in both the DSP and LAA, however this needs to be enforced. The next step is to formalise the structure and increase the group’s recognition. Phil Collins has resigned as Chair; Paul Gompertz of Devon Wildlife Trust has been suggested as a replacement.

6.0 AOB and date of next meeting

- Exmoor National Park has submitted a very strong response to Devon Economic Strategy highlighting some issues. A revised version of the DES and Development/Action Plan will be produced by 15th November and should then be available for wider circulation, including the PSG for a generic view
- A report by the Church of England has been released on the ethics of investment between supermarkets and farmers, available on their website <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr10607.html> or <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/ethical/policystatements/fairtrade.pdf>
- Devon Wildlife Trust is highlighting a Defra consultation on Lyme Bay <http://www.savelymebayreefs.org/saveourseas/SaveLymeBayDefault.aspx>
- 2008 Rural Futures Conference being held in Plymouth in April
- Communications Strategy for DRN is being rewritten ***Comments and Key aims, objectives to Leanne***
- Workwise UK – Pete Tansey has been promoting the signing of a concordat to encourage a regional initiative to work smarter and reduce travel

Date of Next Meeting – Friday 11th January 2008, at Follaton House, Totnes. 1 pm Lunch and 1.30pm meeting start