



**RURAL
ENGLAND**
NETWORKING / RESEARCH / LEARNING

ENGLAND THROUGH A RURAL LENS

A report from Rural England



March 2017



RURAL ENGLAND WHO ARE WE?

Rural England is a Community Interest Company specialising in research, networking, and best rural practice. It is independent from the rest of the Rural Services Network (RSN) but buys administrative support from them. The work of Rural England is overseen by a Stakeholder Group made up of people who were previously engaged with the Commission for Rural Communities together with representatives of some 34 organisations in England which have strong interest in rural issues and matters. It comprises:

ORGANISATIONS

ACRE

Richard Quallington, Acting Chief Executive

AGE UK

Angela Kitchin & Hannah Pearce, Head of External Affairs

ARTHUR RANK (The churches' rural resource centre) Jerry

Marshall Chief Executive

BIG LOTTERY FUND

Alice Grimes, England Portfolio Development

BRITISH YOUTH COUNCIL

Jo Hobbs, Chief Executive

CALOR GAS Ltd

Holly Jago, Corporate Affairs Manager

CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND

Erica Popplewell & Belinda Gordon,

Head of Govt & Rural Affairs

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

Alice Woudhuysen, London Campaign Manager

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

RURAL ISSUES GROUP

Jane Mordue, Chair of Group

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

Sarah Lee, Head of Policy

CCRI (University of Gloucestershire)

Professor Janet Dwyer

COUNTRY LAND & BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Christopher Price, Policy Director

CUMBRIA UNIVERSITY

Professor Alison Marshall,

Health Technology & Innovation

FARMING COMMUNITY NETWORK

Charles Smith, Chief Executive

FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES

David Webb, Rural Chair

FIRST GROUP

John Birtwistle, Head of Policy UK Bus

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

Tim Jones, South West LEP

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION UNIT

Dr Jonathan Carr-West, Chief Executive

LOCALITY

Tony Armstrong, Chief Executive

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AREAS

OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Howard Davies, Chief Executive

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ACTION

Neil Cleeveley, Chief Executive

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Jonathan Owen, Chief Executive

NATIONAL FARMERS' UNION

Suzanne Clear, Senior Planning & Rural Affairs Advisor

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

Oliver Hicks-Pattison, Research & Campaigns Co-Ordinator

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF

YOUNG FARMERS' CLUBS

Sarah Palmer, Agricultural Officer

NATIONAL PARKS ENGLAND

Amanda Brace, Policy Officer

NATIONAL TRUST

Patrick Begg, Director

PLUNKETT FOUNDATION

James Alcock, Head of Frontline

PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Ian Sherriff, Academic Partnership Lead for Dementia

PRINCE'S COUNTRYSIDE FUND

Helen Aldis, Manager

ROYAL INSTITUTION OF CHARTERED SURVEYORS

Jeremy Blackburn, Head of Policy

RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

David Inman, Director

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Trevor Cherrett, Rural Adviser

UK YOUTH

Georgina Fung, National Programmes Manager

WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE

Polly Gibb, Policy Director

EX COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Professor Sheena Asthana (Plymouth University)

Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (Former Director)

Alison McLean OBE (Former Commissioner)

Sue Prince OBE, DL (Former Commissioner)

Professor Mark Shucksmith (Newcastle University)

Professor Michael Winter OBE (Exeter University)

Lord Cameron of Dillington

(Former Countryside Agency Chair)

Working with the Rural Services Network (rsnonline) we believe we have available the country's largest rural network. That network comprises 150 Principal Local Authorities, 80 other large national organisations involved in service provision, over 11,000 rural Parish Council contacts, and some 4,000 rural schools. Up to 60,000 people across England see our news sheets and topic commentaries every week. Some 600 people are involved in the two initial sounding boards and others are planned.

RSN and ourselves are also seeking to establish a Rural Small Businesses network although this is at a preliminary stage.

THE PROPOSED INITIAL SERVICE

Clearly there can be no comparison between the former Commission of Rural Communities (once a £6m per annum organisation) and these much more modest proposals. Nonetheless, by focusing on the issues of greatest importance to rural communities and service providers, we aim to meet their most crucial information needs.

The Stakeholder Group have been considering their first priorities with a view to maximising effective networking and research across rural areas in England; monitoring rural services and facilitating the exchange of innovative and best practice and have identified a need for:

1. A Biennial State of Rural Services Report

2. A key report hopefully eventually yearly on a topic of national significance. The first report now being issued is 'Rural vulnerability as affecting older people.'

We plan to invest c £10k p.a. worth of funding for these priorities doubling and then tripling that amount as funding allows.

1. A BIENNIAL 'STATE OF THE RURAL SERVICES REPORT' FOR ENGLAND.

Monitoring rural service trends throughout the austerity years is critically important but at the moment the Group are able only to focus on a limited number of topics each year. (A comprehensive overview would be invaluable.) Whilst this is considered the most important service it is unfortunately one of the more costly ones. Given a realistic approach to available initial resources, a biennial publication covering some 8 or 9 services is intended in the short term widening out as resources allow.

2. THE KEY TOPIC REPORT

This will supplement the State of Rural Services Report by investigating in detail a key area of rural concern. The first topic to be covered will be 'Rural vulnerability as affecting older people.' It is intended that these key topic reports be published at the very least every other year often alternating with State of Rural Services Reports.

As stated, to fulfil these two initial research priorities we need in total £25,000 of financial support per annum, and we are accordingly seeking contributions of £500 p.a. from fifty companies.

THE CURRENT POSITION

BIENNIAL 'STATE OF RURAL SERVICES' REPORT FOR ENGLAND

This report will collate and analyse recent evidence and information about the provision of services to rural communities and businesses. The 2016 report will look at a range of service types, variously provided by the public, private and community sectors.

It is intended that this will be the first in a time-series of (biennial) reports, which track changes and identify trends, thus stimulating policy debate about the challenges, opportunities and

the best policy responses.

Work is due to complete on the current State of Rural Services report by the Autumn of 2016.

KEY TOPIC REPORT

This research aims to investigate key issues affecting the vulnerability of older rural residents and to consider their future implications in the context of an ageing rural population.

This research, which is expected to be completed by the end of April 2016, will comprise four papers supplemented by interview findings. Draft papers on 'Income and Poverty'; 'Health' (including social services); and 'Adverse Actions of Others' (crime, abuse and neglect) are already out for consultation with Stakeholders. The fourth paper on 'Isolation and Loneliness' is currently under preparation.

PLANNED ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS

In addition, the group is also already working on a variety of projects and aspires to develop others. Together, and with the necessary overall administration costs added those have an eventual additional revenue cost of approximately £100,000. Progress will by necessity be incremental and on an 'as' and 'when' basis.

These further ten proposals which we hope to introduce relate to networking, research and learning (orientated around best practice).

NETWORKING

1. The UK Rural Policy, Practitioners and Research Group (UKRPPRG)

A UK group has been set up where rural organisations can come together and comment on current issues. With devolution that has occurred and differing systems of Assemblies and Parliaments, there is a lot that can be learnt by comparing and contrasting on a UK wide basis.

The group complements the Rural Coalition, an English group of rural organisations set up by the CRC before its closure and from time to time involving DEFRA, which looks at and seeks to rural proof Westminster legislation.

The UKRPPR group has established four convenors: Janet Dwyer (Gloucestershire University), Ruth McAreevey (Queens University Belfast), Jane Atterton (Scotland's Rural College) and Paul Milbourne (Cardiff University). Brian Wilson of the RSN is the overall convenor.

It currently involves some 50 organisations across the UK. It is hoped to involve all UK local authorities in some survey work. This is an ambitious project but of considerable merit if it can be underpinned.

The group has already held a series of useful meetings, and will now work alongside Rural England. There appears to be clear potential for rural organisations across the UK to link in this way. To operate this work area fully there is a requirement for a 'coordinator' perhaps working one day a week to structure its activities. The overall cost of that is estimated to be a sum in the

region of £10k per annum.

2. Networking for Real

The Group wish to establish networks across specific topic and work areas including young people and rural small businesses. With a database of email addresses including groups of specific service contacts already existing they feel they are well placed to develop a whole raft of such networks. Given the disparate nature of rural England a conference discussion concerning work topics and around rural problems and working would be extremely valuable.

Again this is important work. A coordinator (£c8k p.a.) is needed to capitalise on the potential that clearly exists.

3. A Rural News Service for Residents

The Group's current news service is geared to organisations and people working in rural areas. Rural issues need headlining to individual residents and may be through parish and community networks. The news format would have to be different for this market which we are very keen to see established.

There is no rural daily national news service. Clearly if one is to be established it would be best to do it via a web site. One option that might be envisaged is through negotiations with the BBC, ITV, Sky or B.T with a link through to the RSN web site. Depending on those negotiations there may be a cost – our estimate is for a journalist at an hour a day or an approximate yearly sum of say £8,000.

The establishment of a consultation network for rural small businesses.

England lacks a business network that is truly cross rural and we would like to tackle this omission. We want to establish a panel balanced across the various rural sectors.

Initially, we would like to establish a sounding board from volunteers later refining it so that it can be used as a true cross business sampling mechanism.

The estimated cost is £3,000 a year.

PLANNED ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS CONT.

5. Rural Sounding Boards and a Rural Panel

(a) Sounding Boards

The Group are certain that from their extensive list of contacts they can establish a series of extremely strong sounding boards which could provide valuable opinion on rural topics and issues. These boards could be utilised either with or independent of the calls for evidence system and its work. The boards would have cross sector capacity and would therefore be a significant asset.

Two boards have been established covering principal and parish councils. However it is vital that work is done to be able to canvass rural resident views and also those of young people in the countryside.

Further boards can be put in place at relatively low cost.

(b) A Rural Panel.

The Sounding Boards will not be constituted on the basis of a truly representative cross-section so it is not felt they could be termed a Rural Panel in the true sense of the phrase. Creating such a panel would obviously require more detailed work. The cost of running it would therefore be in the region of £7,000 a year. However such a venture might generate some income from contractors using this system to test their work. There would appear to be a significant gap in the market.

RESEARCH

6. Heart of the Village Research.

A developing service which will look at non-public service activities and trends particularly in relation to rural villages.

It would be excellent to consider a mapping of facilities across England county by county so that trends can be accurately identified county by county.

The Group would like to expand to a service that has the objective of not only identifying such trends but also allowing similar localities to exchange information and successful practice. It may identify key issues meriting policy interventions.

Expansion as detailed would cost in the region of £8,000 a year including staff time.

7. A Postgraduate Event.

The group would like to establish a rural conference presenting an opportunity for university post graduates to outline to rural organisations, and their fellow students current research they are involved with. It is hoped that a by-product of these meetings might be a postgraduate rural students group.

It may be that existing annual sessions run by Gloucestershire

University can be built on to take this project forward incrementally. These sessions include a postgraduate students' event every January. There should be capacity for a postgraduate students' research group as part of the consultation mechanics discussed earlier in this document.

This could be a relatively low cost initiative as some building blocks are in place. A cost in the region of £2,000 might be anticipated.

LEARNING

8. Calls for Evidence

We feel it should be possible to engage, through email, some 100,000 people across rural areas in England (a near doubling of our current arrangements each week.) This would assist massively in providing the opportunity in establishing views and comments on specific topics. Having networked Parish Councils and Schools, the Group would now like to also establish strong links across Village Hall Committees, Parish newspaper editors, village shopkeepers, Local Trustees and interested local people.

This is considered another vital work area. Once again the work area would be considerably assisted by a coordinator establishing and anchoring these arrangements. The work would cost in the region of £5,000 a year.

9. A Rural Vulnerability Service

The service seeks to establish a data base of information relating to specific subjects threatening rural areas such as the lack of broadband and fuel poverty. The data base is updated with the latest information as it becomes available.

It has been possible to commence this scheme with sponsorship from Calor. Three areas, Fuel Poverty, Rural Local Transport, and Rural Broadband have been covered in the form of a newsletter sent out monthly (covering each area once every three months.) These newsletters then slowly constitute a library of information on the website.

It would be good to grow some dedicated research capacity onto this service.

We are also planning to produce periodic briefing notes on these topics.

A sum of some £12,000 a year for a researcher to give a half day a week to each topic would transform this service into a really material one.

10. A Library of Good Rural Practice

The Group has an extensive e mail contact group giving direct communication to over 20,000 people and groups. It is believed

SUPPORT PROGRESS TO DATE

60,000 people view this material. We are therefore in a really strong position to call for and document areas of best practice on specific topics.

Currently this service deals with topics as and when the research can be afforded. The need is for a much fuller service which would be of tremendous value as providers seek to deliver the best possible service in really difficult times with minimal resource.

To be providing the fuller topic coverage the situation requires an eventual sum of some £12,000 a year.

Together, these additional proposals have an additional revenue cost of approximately £100,000. We believe this is a realistic target, achievable in incremental stages over further appeal tranches

We receive continuing annual support from Calor and First Bus. Without their backing we would not have reached this point. They are the props to our whole operation.

We are also extremely grateful to the following infrastructure companies who have agreed to be our registered supporters with a £500 contribution each year.

Water Companies: Affinity Water, Anglian Water, Northumbria Water, Severn Trent Water, South East Water, Southern Water, South West Water, Thames Water, Wessex Water

Fuel Providers: British Gas, Daligas, Eon UK plc, EDF Energy, Ecotricity Group Ltd, Green Energy (UK) plc, RWE nPower, Scottish Power

Fuel Distribution Networks: Electricity North West, National Grid Gas Distribution, Northern Gas Network, Northern Powergrid (North East), Scottish Power Energy Networks, UK Power Networks, Wales & West, Western Power Distribution

Phone & Internet Supplier: Europasat, Gigaclear

Land Owners: The Crown Estate, Clinton Devon Estates

Land Agents: Strutt & Parker LLP

STAKEHOLDER RURAL WORK

We will compile here, as it becomes available, details of rural investigation work being undertaken by the Stakeholders of this project. It is important there is a liaison between all organisations in relation to the initiatives being undertaken. There will be links to the material/research papers to download.

UNIVERSITY RURAL WORK

We will catalogue here rural work currently being taking place across Universities in England. We seek to be a conduit for liaison between Universities themselves and organisations with a rural interest. We hope that the Rural England initiative can play a fulcrum role in doing this. There will be links to the material/research papers to download.

Rural England Stakeholders:



RURAL ENGLAND

Community Interest Company

Rural England Supporters:



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