



RURAL
ENGLAND
NETWORKING / RESEARCH / LEARNING

A WALL OF SUPPORT

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.

RURAL ENGLAND THE PROPOSED INITIAL SERVICE

Clearly there can be no comparison between the former Commission for 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 facilitating the exchange of innovative and best practice and have identified two immediate priorities.

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 £10k p.a. worth of funding for these priorities and to be doubling and then tripling the 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 moment the Group are able only to focus on 8 to 9 topics. (A comprehensive overview would be invaluable). Whilst this is considered the most important service it is unfortunately one of the more costly ones. As funding allows we will widen out this report.

2. 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 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.

FUNDING OUR SOLUTION BUILDING A WALL OF SUPPORT FOR RURAL ENGLAND

The measures we outline are dependent on some revenue support. We believe rural areas will suffer very considerably unless we can find a way forward to tackle the growing problems of lack of independent research and monitoring.

Cutbacks in Public Sector finances at both Council and Government level preclude funding from these sources. Any grant aid, whilst welcome, cannot offer an enduring solution so our aim is to build a continuing 'Wall of Support' from the private sector. Calor and First Bus have indicated their willingness to act as endorsees for the Wall of Support and we hope other businesses will assist in progressing these measures from plan to reality. We are looking eventually for 250 firms who would make relatively small contributions in one of the five appeals we plan to assist the establishment of the overall 125k fund. We recognised this will be far from easy but it is our only way forward.

This our first targeted appeal to fifty companies aims to establish the initial proposals we have detailed.

PROGRESS TO DATE

In our quest for our first fifty supporters we have been concentrating on infrastructure providers.

This has produced the following initial 30 supporters to whom we are enormously grateful:

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 Suppliers:

Europasat, Gigaclear

Land Owners:

Crown Estate, Clinton Devon Estates

Land Agents:

Strutt & Parker LLP

WHAT WILL SUPPORTERS GET FOR THEIR MONEY

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

What makes Rural England a different proposition compared to all the many other requests you receive from organisations requesting your company's assistance.

We can provide you with six very solid reasons which we feel are significant.

(1) Sixteen percent of England's population reside in a rural area. Rural areas comprise four fifths of the country's land area. We would be surprised if we can be beaten for customer reach by any other potential corporate responsibility calls.

(2) Our ask is relatively small and affordable.

(3) We will spread news of your company's support to our weekly e mail audience of 60,000 people.

(4) You will be in immediate partnership with over 30 of England's national organisations.

(5) As a result of the range of work we undertake you can be assured we will benefit work areas that have will public resonance with all the people living in rural areas.

(6) We will give your company the opportunity to input into our work three times a year. We can assure you of continual involvement and liaison.

We have said that in return we will do the following for the companies who become involved with us as official supporters.

- We will convene a meeting once a year of each of the relevant groupings of supporters to discuss both the research, the position generally and what supporters want from the package of support from their viewpoint.
- We would give all our supporters on one occasion each year the opportunity to provide a short piece detailing any perspective they wish to present in our weekly digest. If this is from a rural viewpoint – all the better.
- Two of the measures we wish to undertake as Rural England are a biennial report on the State of Rural Services and hopefully an annual report on a rural 'vulnerability' topic. We attach word documents in respect of this work. In both exercises we would give supporters and of course stakeholders the opportunity to make observations on drafts as these documents are produced so

that some potential input is facilitated.

- We will give acknowledgement of support on all research documents as they become public.
- There will be an opportunity for delegate pack publicity and reduced price exhibition space at the annual Rural Conference held every September.
- We will be giving prominence to the Supporters Group and to individual supporters on the Rural England website as it develops.

CONCLUSION

Further public sector cut backs are seen as inevitable and rural areas with a lower starting level of service will be hit very badly.

We feel will make an enormous positive difference to how rural areas in England deals with tough challenges by providing an independent source of reliable material:

- BEST PRACTICE
- STRUCTURED MONITORING
- EXTENSIVE NETWORK SYSTEMS ACROSS ENGLAND
- FEEDBACK FORUMS, OPINION GATHERING AND COMMUNITY LIAISON

Only a wall of support through the private sector can put these vital mechanisms in place.

6 REASONS TO SUPPORT US

1

SUPPORTING RURAL ENGLAND CAN HELP YOU DEMONSTRATE YOUR CONCERN FOR THOSE PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS WHO WORK IN OR DEPEND ON YOUR BUSINESS FOR THEIR LIVELIHOODS AND WELL-BEING.

3

WE PROVIDE THE CATALYST BY WHICH EVIDENCE LEADS TO ACTION TO OVERCOME SOME OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL AREAS.

5

OUR WEEKLY E-MAIL BULLETIN WILL RAISE YOUR COMPANY'S PROFILE AMONGST 60,000 PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN RURAL AREAS.

2

WE ARE NOW THE ONLY NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION COLLECTING EVIDENCE THAT SHOWS DECISION MAKERS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE AND WORK IN A RURAL AREA.

4

THROUGH OUR NETWORK, YOU WILL HAVE DIRECT CONTACT WITH 30 ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE WORKING FOR THE BENEFIT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES.

6

WE RECOGNISE AND WANT TO DRAW ON YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE.

Rural England Stakeholders:



Rural England Supporters:

