

## **Notes of Rural England Stakeholder Group meeting.**

**London, 18 June 2019**

Present:

Margaret Clark (Chair); Brian Wilson (RE); Graham Biggs (RE); David Inman (RE); Jane Hart (RE); Chris Cowcher (RE and Plunkett); Steve Emery (RE and Birmingham Uni); Janet Dwyer (RE and CCRI); Derek Egan (Defra); Daniel Carey-Dawes (CPRE); James Alcock (Plunkett); Helen Fagin (Prince's Community Trust); Amanda Stevens (NAVCA)

Apologies:

Alison Mclean (ex CRC); Andrew Shirley (CLBA); Mark Shucksmith (Newcastle Uni); John Birtwistle (First Group); Richard Quallington (ACRE); Dan Paskins and Kamna Muralidharan (Big Lottery Community Fund); Claire Maxim and Elizabeth Clark (Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre); Trevor Cherrett (TCPA); Sarah Palmer (NFYFC); Charles Smith (Farming Community Network); Andy Parker (RE, Calor); Andrew Francis (NFU); Paul Hamblin (National Parks England); Alison Marshall (Cumbria Uni)

### **Welcome and introduction**

The Chair, Margaret Clark, opened the meeting just after 1.00 p.m. and welcomed those attending.

1. Margaret Clark was re-elected as Chair
2. Richard Quallington was re-elected as Vice Chair
3. A number of apologies for absence had been received [listed above]
4. (a) The minutes of the joint Stakeholders meeting held on 3 December 2018 were agreed.  
  
(b) A consultation had taken place with stakeholders regarding the frequency and focus of future meetings. 100% of the responding stakeholders had indicated that they were happy to continue in that role and a clear majority favoured a revised pattern of less frequent but more focused meetings i.e. one main full-day meeting each June, plus invitations to the annual Rural Vulnerability Day and (subject to its future) the annual face-to-face meeting of UK RPPRG. Some additional contribution, from willing members of the group, to start and finish groups relating to major pieces of research will be most welcome. This is accordingly the first of the reformed pattern of meetings. Graham commented that email exchanges between stakeholders can helpfully supplement the opportunities at scheduled meetings.
5. Brian outlined some Directors matters.

He reported that whilst two directors had been lost from the team, three new directors (Andy Parker from Calor; Janet Dwyer from CCRI and Chris Cowcher from Plunkett) had joined.

In view of the evident need for fund raising in order to get Rural England into a more sustainable financial footing, the Directors have given consideration to how this might be achieved and have agreed, following his interview by Brian and Jo, the secondment of Jon Turner from RSN to carry out this role for two days a week over the next year.

6. Graham referred to the budget papers that had been circulated with the agenda and clarified that the majority of the £19,000 expected to be carried forward would now be allocated to the secondment [see 5 above]. He also reported that Calor had kindly agreed that £6,000 of their funding can be transferred from the Rural Vulnerability News reports to the research fund. Whilst there is nothing dramatic in the budget spending is exceeding monies generated emphasising the need to bring in more income.

7. Stakeholders were asked about the research being carried out by or for their organisation.

Defra: Derek advised that Defra had published a Statement of Rural Research Priorities <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-research-priorities/statement-of-rural-research-priorities>

Current research areas include:

- Research on drivers of productivity which tries to influence positive development and to make the case, to DCLG and BEIS in particular, for investing in rural.
- A study involving rural stakeholders, assessing impacts of the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund
- Community led local development. Looking at the case for Shared Prosperity Fund funding for community development such as the renovation of buildings and residential conversions. This hopes to bring about a step change for development in rural England.
- Outward supply chains addressing concerns about Brexit on farm activity

In future there is likely to be a strategic approach to working much more with academic partners to leverage in more and better research. Ad hoc work determined by ministerial priorities will remain. There will be more funding for on-line services and the collation of local data from LEPs to create intelligence on what works in rural areas from impact review information.

Prince's Countryside Fund: Helen said that there was an ongoing review of past grants. The Village Survival Guide is in the final stage of preparation [now published <https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/research/village-survival-guide> ]. It has been developed with a number of stakeholder organisations and will provide a 10 step approach to stimulate village communities.

Plunkett: James advised that Plunkett was continuing to monitor patterns of community provision of shops and pubs. After some concern that in the previous year 7 community shops had closed but only 3 or 4 had opened, the position is looking better this year. Plunkett is currently also carrying out research on community woodlands.

NAVCA: Amanda told the group of NAVCA's work on responses to natural disasters, such as flooding, and other emergencies looking at the links between emergency services and

voluntary services. Ongoing work is also focusing on Primary Care Trusts looking at how well the statutory and voluntary sectors are co-ordinated.

University of Birmingham: Steve referred to a previously completed project that had looked at community, business and physical resilience to flooding following the 2013/14 floods. <https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/evidence-briefings/preparing-for-floods/>

Janet mentioned that Gloucestershire Association for Voluntary and Community Action had produced some useful toolkits.

CPRE: Daniel advised that CPRE was actively looking at a number of key areas one of which relates to rural transport deserts. That research is expected to be completed in July or August.

Graham offered the use of Rural England networks to disseminate research results.

8. Brian referred to the previously circulated summary of the results of the Housing Opinion Survey. CCRI and Rural England are trying to establish a Rural Panel and this second survey sought not only to gauge views on rural housing issues but also to assist the establishment of a more representative panel. Participation had been good overall, with 714 responses, but it was somewhat skewed towards older and comparatively well-off respondents and attempts will now be made to recruit from under-represented categories.

Interesting results from the survey included:

- Views on rural house- building were split almost evenly between those in favour and those against.
- There was wide consensus on the need for affordable housing for local people
- Regarding inter-generational unfairness older respondents tended to think was a divisive and unhelpful way of looking at housing issues whilst younger people thought it was directly applicable.

Thought is now being given to the next survey which is likely to take place this summer.

9. Discussions about any possible research partnership work between stakeholders and Rural England would be most welcome.

10. Jane referred to her recent research on the challenges facing rural 16-18 year olds in accessing appropriate education and work based learning (WBL). 16-18 year olds had been hard to engage. However, findings from various sources including a limited number of interviews and questionnaires; a more extensive on-line rural survey; and existing research and statistics highlighted a number of key issues. These include:

- The importance of accessibility to appropriate education to future opportunities for the individual student and to social mobility more generally.
- That the distribution of School 6<sup>th</sup> forms, 6<sup>th</sup> Form Colleges and Further Education Colleges varies widely from area to area.
- Long travel distances often at inconvenient times. Evidence showed some young people travelling 3+ hours and/or 60+ miles a day.
- Considerable travel expense, often £200 a term or even more.

- Heavy reliance on parents for transport.
- Wide variations in the availability of advertised apprenticeships but usually few in rural areas.

Jane indicated that the final draft should be available shortly and made available to supporters. It will also be circulated to rural panel members and selected organisations such as UK Youth will be asked whether the findings resonate with their experiences and understanding of the issues.

11. Brian told the group that thought had been given to exploring rural health care issues including a consideration of Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs). However an opportunity has recently emerged involving updating of the Rural Health Toolkit. Not only would that be a very useful thing to do but would potentially attract match funding from the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.

There was no opposition to the suggested focus of the next piece of research being to update the Rural Health Toolkit. However, stakeholders hoped there was still scope to produce a related report on the rural dimension to STPs. In discussion, Amanda commented that she might be able to contribute some useful information on Public Health and social prescription.

12. Feedback from the 2019 Vulnerability Day had been positive. It had generated a lot of media coverage (through Lexington) for Brian's State of Rural Services report, enabled supporters to showcase their work and facilitated debate. The room had however been rather cramped. Work is starting on planning for the 2020 Vulnerability Day.

The financial Supporters Day held in April had also been well received with supporters showing genuine interest in Rural England's work as well as giving them an opportunity to focus on their work in the afternoon.

13. Other Business.

Brian advised that the joint meeting with the UK Rural Policy and Practitioners Research Group is being planned for November or December and that a date will be circulated as soon as possible.

The meeting concluded at approximately 3.15 p.m.