

## **MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC**

### **STAKEHOLDER GROUP AGM On-line via Zoom**

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, 11am – 12:45pm**

### **MINUTES**

#### **Present:**

Catriona Adams (National Federation of Women's Institutes) (CA)  
Graham Biggs (Company Secretary) (GB)  
Daniel Carey-Dawes (CPRE – The Countryside Charity) (DCD)  
Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association) (TC)  
Richard Clarke (National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) (RC)  
Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (MC)  
Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union) (AC)  
Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)  
Maddy Fitzgerald (Prince's Countryside Fund) (MF)  
Dr Jane Hart (RE Director) (JH)  
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)  
Sarah Lee (Countryside Alliance) (SL)  
Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum) (HL)  
Jonathan Owen (National Association of Local Councils) (JO)  
Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)  
Richard Quallington (ACRE) (RQ)  
Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle) (MS)  
David Webb (Federation of Small Businesses) (DW)  
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)  
  
Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

John Birtwistle (First Group), Lord Cameron of Dillington, Rev'd Elizabeth Clark (Arthur Rank Centre – Germinate), Professor Janet Dwyer (CCRI), Keith Halstead (Prince's Countryside Fund), Ellie Jesson (Prince's Countryside Fund), Tim Jones (South West LEP), Aanchal Mann (National Federation of Women's Institutes)

#### **2. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**

MC proposed RQ as Vice-Chair and RQ proposed MC as Chair. The group was asked for any other nominations – there were none and so both MC and RQ were re-elected without opposition.  
MC caveated her appointment this year by informing the meeting that she may stand down next year.

### 3. Minutes of Previous AGM Meeting (Attachment 1)

Minutes of the previous AGM meeting 18.06.2019 were accepted as a true record.

### 4. Matters Arising

#### Minutes of 18.06.2019

4b) New format for meetings ie an Annual meeting and a research meeting per year.

MC asked for any reflections on the new arrangements.

BW commented that in this new era of Zoom meetings it actually presents an opportunity to hold an interim meeting in the Autumn. It would enable the Stakeholder Group to keep in touch and feed into the next SORS report.

GB stated that he was going to raise the same point and that perhaps the focus of that meeting could be on research, as this was integral to Rural England's core business, and also funding opportunities. The consensus was that this was a good idea.

**Action:** A focused meeting on relevant topics be set up for the Autumn. BA to arrange a date.

7) Defra's Statement of Rural Research Priorities

TC asked if there was an update.

DE confirmed that it was still being edited and that Covid-19 had delayed matters. DE offered to share a draft copy of this.

**Action:** DE to email a draft copy to BA for circulation.

### 5. RE Budget Report (Attachment 2)

GB informed the meeting that the outcomes for 20/21 and 21/22 were positive ie £9K and £11K carry forward respectively which was a good position to be in. There was no reason to discontinue or re-think any plans at this stage though still need to retain Supporters and continue with research.

GB confirmed that one Supporter had left due to Covid pressures but was hoping to re-join and to date there were no other indicators of withdrawal from the others. To date the Supporter income received is £7K out of £13K. Many organisations have a payment system which slows up the process. There is cover in the budget for minimum withdrawal.

DI explained that some of the Rural England Supporters- especially the Utility Companies - understand that research is important and that it tallies with work they are doing. We need to work and "chime" with what they want to do ie rural disadvantage and vulnerability are key.

### 6. Ongoing and Pipeline Projects (Attachment 3)

BW summarised the position of each project and the partners involved.

Several Supporters had provided the extra funding for the Rural Vulnerability Research project, which should be taken forward with CCRI.

The Rural Proofing Health Toolkit is well advanced and should be ready for launch in the Autumn as an online toolkit. JH is drafting the case studies and it is hoped to have a few local NHS/Social Care organisations willing to trial the toolkit and make any necessary revisions at that stage.

The Rural Net Zero Inquiry draft report, prepared by Mickledore Consultants, was based on a document and policy review. A series of interviews had been held and initial findings will be tested through Zoom based workshops.

GB noted that BW and JH have found it useful to establish a task and finish group involving some Stakeholders to advise the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit.

SP asked if it was possible to be considered for the task and finish group for the Net Zero project. The NFYFC have launched a Climate Control video challenge which has seen a good uptake and was proving useful to getting young people engaged in Net Zero issues.

**Action:** BW agreed that it would be useful to invite NFYFC to a project workshop.

MC asked whether the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit could or should have links to the Covid-19 pandemic.

BW thought that the pandemic begs questions about the direction of recent health policy, not least the drive to treat more people outside of hospital settings and to centralise hospital services, reducing the number of hospital beds. There may be scope to make such links when the Toolkit is launched.

MS stated he was interested in the Health Toolkit and asked what aspects of the health and care agenda it covered. Important issues had been thrown up by Covid-19 ie how well Primary Care has been handled, the 111 service, on-line services and lack of access to support; the by-passing of local public health and what would work best in a local setting.

BW confirmed that there are six areas and these are: main hospital provision, primary and community care, mental health, preventative and public health services, social care and workforce. It is broad ranging and aimed at local level NHS organisations and partnerships eg STPs and Primary Care networks. It is not aimed at national policy, though the Department of Health & Social Care should still be rural proofing based on Defra guidance.

MS commented that Ceredigion Council undertook its own track and trace policy and that Covid-19 has been greatly reduced, so local action could prove effective. A case study like that could be instructive.

MC believed that the fear factor was directly related to the lack of services eg in Cornwall there are only 10 ICU beds. It might be good to think about the bigger messages than just the toolkit.

GB said that is the intent of the toolkit and to look at the delivery of services drawn up at a local level and question if the policies and procedures are fit for purpose in the local rural context. The toolkit would be used to see if one size fits all or can services be adjusted. In terms of the launch, there is the opportunity to gather together these big messages and there will be lessons to learn from Covid from a rural aspect.

MS asked if the access to cash project is still going ahead, given the trend towards not using cash in the current climate.

GB said he is waiting to hear from the client on how or if to progress the project. He thought that the interest of the project funder may have diminished.

MC commented that this theme could be used for the SORS report.

DI noted that this was the first opportunity to present this series of research projects and emphasised that Rural England CIC was here to be used for research. The Supporters, if they use RE for research help keep it going. If any Stakeholders wished to discuss research that would be welcome.

TC asked about the capacity of Rural England to undertake new research projects.

GB stated that the Business Plan prefaces what outcomes can be achieved if income streams are maintained. The SORS report is every three years and in other years one or two other research projects could investigate issues raised by the SORS report. It is based on annual funding from the Supporters' Group, the Utility Panel and Calor.

HL gave some background to the proposed Impact of Rural Touring Arts on Loneliness, Isolation and Wellbeing project. An earlier research project on the sector undertaken by Coventry University did not look specifically at the themes of loneliness and isolation. There is a wish to undertake a further project to provide evidence on the benefits of the arts and theatre on these themes, including as evidence for social prescribing by GPs.

## **7. NICRE update (BW)**

BW, commenting in the absence of Professor Janet Dwyer, gave an update.

This is a project with the University of Newcastle, the CCRI and Warwick Business School. The formal start has been delayed until September due to Covid-19, but the University of Newcastle and CCRI have been recruiting researchers to join the project.

MS confirmed that NICRE officially launches on 1<sup>st</sup> September and a link to their website is here: [www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/nationalinnovationcentreforruralenterprise](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/nationalinnovationcentreforruralenterprise)

**Action:** GB to ask JD if an update on the project can be circulated to the Stakeholder group.

#### 8. Business Plan (Attachment 4)

GB updated the Group that the secondee had left in December 2019 and the Business Plan had been adjusted accordingly. The Directors had recently met and agreed the new Business Plan and the front page confirms what Rural England CIC is able to do.

There are two new arrangements in place with some of the Supporters. Those who pay £1.2K have an extended membership which provides for representatives of Rural England on their Vulnerability Panels and a further group of Supporters who pay £5K contribute to a bespoke research projects (with an approximate annual value of £18K-£20K).

RQ asked if there could be an update on who the key personnel were in the research projects and what has been achieved.

**Action:** GB commented that there would be a meeting in September for the research programme and an updated report would be made to that meeting.

#### 9. Information Item: New Stakeholder Member

##### **National Rural Touring Forum - NRTF**

Holly Lombardo, Director was welcomed and introduced to the Group by MC. Holly gave a quick overview of the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF). It networks, develops and supports the ecosystem that delivers high-quality creative experiences across communities and rural areas in the UK. The aim of the NRTF is to strengthen and support rural populations to bring professional work to their venues. Please see the link for further information: [www.ruraltouring.org](http://www.ruraltouring.org)

#### 10. Roundtable session - Stakeholders to provide a brief update on research/developments

**DEFRA** - DE had a number of studies. The first is looking at **local perspectives** on rural communities and businesses, with case studies across rural England. These would take into account the composition of populations, perspectives of local people and their lived experiences. The work was being undertaken by the Universities of Newcastle and Gloucestershire and it was hoped to finish in March 2021. This would be a significant study and different to previous studies. DE had done a literature review with experts for themes of interest.

The second study is investigating **entrepreneurship**, looking at the predisposition of rural areas and their ability to produce new businesses and then sustain and grow them. Northumberland University, with Gary Bosworth and Bob Newby are looking to identify factors that promote growing businesses in different areas. This will complement work undertaken already by Jeremy Phillipson (Newcastle University). Both these studies have been affected by Covid impacting on survey work. Gary's work on counter urbanisation focuses on those who move to rural areas and start businesses and the benefits this brings. The main part of this study is due to complete in September 2020, with the work on home movers due to complete in January 2021.

RQ asked if there was an opportunity for Stakeholders to engage with the research.

DE commented that engagement with academics and Stakeholders was under discussion and rural Stakeholders will form part of the expert group.

**NFWI** – CA informed the Group that the NFWI has carried out a recent survey of members on the impact of Covid-19 during lockdown, their experiences and the impact on their communities. 3,000 people responded re well-being, loneliness and connectiveness. There are calls for changes to benefit women and communities. A second piece of research was "Get on Board" which is a survey to gather data on local bus services and the effects to services prior and post Covid-19.

GB commented that the APPG on Rural Services will be holding a series of agenda items on connectivity

and the first subject is bus services on 14<sup>th</sup> July.

**NFYFC** – SP explained that the NFYFC have undertaken a DEFRA supported survey of members on “Your Post-Brexit Rural Future”. The results should be available in September. The second survey looks at the effects of Covid-19 on farming members with results at the end of August.

**TCPA** - TC has been looking at how communities responded during Covid-19 ahead of a meeting with Danny Kruger MP. TC is also writing an opinion piece on the Countryside Agency’s futures think-piece (The State of the Countryside 2020) written originally in 2003.

**University of Newcastle** – MS is also working on a project about Rural Lives on the Margins, looking at Scotland and England. The field work in Scotland has been completed and the interviews in Northumberland will be conducted on-line. Deadline is to complete the project by Christmas 2020 and disseminate the information in January 2021. At the UKRPPRG meeting in January, MS discussed a project on rural poverty and trends. A paper from that has now been published.

**Action:** MS can send this privately to anyone interested. Both MC and RQ requested a copy.

As Artist in Residence at the university - Joanne Coates – who is a photographer had been featured in an article on rural housing in the Guardian.

**Prince’s Countryside Fund** – MF explained that since the Village Survival Guide has been published there have been 6K copies published and 12K downloads of the Guide. Currently looking at a project on Auction Marts and at other issues such as abattoirs and farming supply chains. The Trust has also given small grants to village shops and pubs.

**FSB** – DW explained that currently the research work has not so much been specifically rural but across all areas. The quarterly State of Business report reflected on trends over the last couple of months, with uncertainty over Brexit and then Covid-19. A key campaign area has been on the low/late payments of bigger companies to smaller suppliers, an issue that seems to be getting worse.

**NRTF** – HL has been advocating and campaigning for Rural Arts and touring. Arts Council England is now looking, with NRTF, at the benefits to local communities from rural touring arts companies and access to local venues etc.

**ACRE** – RQ noted that it is about to publish its ten-yearly survey on Village and Community Halls – opportunities and challenges - which is a major piece of work. ACRE is also surveying its RCC members specifically in relation to challenges and insights on how communities are adapting during the pandemic.

**CPRE** – DCD commented that CPRE launched a report on Rural Transport “deserts”, which focuses on the north east and south west. Phase 2 of the project will look at how bus services can be better funded. Another project is looking at County Farms and creating a shared vision for County Council owned farms as beacons of sustainable farming. The CPRE is also scoping out a project on community owned renewables and looking at key worker housing in rural areas. Corporately, CPRE is looking at a Regeneration manifesto post Covid-19 - Greener, Better, Faster and has a vacancy for a Research role for an economic project.

**NFU** - AC informed the Group that the NFU is working on a Green Recovery for farming and rural communities. It is also working on its latest farm survey on digital connectivity. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of getting everyone connected. This will be published in September 2020.

**Countryside Alliance** – SL is also looking at a Rural Broadband and Connectivity survey which will be launched at the end of July 2020. A Rural Crime Survey with 10,000 responses was undertaken at the

beginning of 2020 had been due to be launched in May around the Police and Crime Commissioners' elections. It is hoped that it will now be published in September.

**Action:** MC reiterated that there should be another meeting in the Autumn to allow more time for a "round-table" discussion.

#### **11. State of Rural Services 2021 - Early thoughts on services to cover (Attachment 5)**

BW commented that the third SORS report is due to be published in the beginning of 2022. The SORS report normally takes steers from the Stakeholder group on its scope. BW would welcome this again and in particular if there were any suggestions on service areas. It is then normally narrowed down to 7-9 areas. An option is to make this report Covid related, but available data on services may come from earlier dates. It may be possible to update that with intelligence/surveys.

JO stated that the report should definitely be Covid-19 relevant and could look at access to cash.

MC would like a topic area to be on the worth around civil society and local charities.

MS agreed with the charities topic plus the topics of homelessness and "voice". In terms of experience – how did people manage to get deliveries of food, advice and support. Post-Covid, the interaction of the welfare benefits service, freelancers, self-employed – how were these groups affected?

GB commented that we may be looking at a very different report ie what does the "new normal" look like in rural areas, not just a review of what had happened based on detailed data.

MF would like community assets as one of the topic areas revisiting the topic from the 2016 report. Could look at how we reflect on areas most affected eg farms that diversify in tourism/camp sites and how have they been affected.

TC also agreed with the charities focus and also on how much older people rely on them.

CA would like focus topics to include mental health and loneliness.

GB reflected that the Directors would need some time to look at these suggestions and the research undertaken by Stakeholders. He thought that this could make SORS a real joint report.

MC stated that the report could focus on how rural has changed in a post-Covid world and make use of the research that Stakeholders have undertaken.

MS suggested that an Autumn meeting should report back on emerging research findings on Covid-19 and so help to focus the SORS report.

BW thanked the group for their helpful comments and noted that the Rural Residents Panel could be used to survey some of the issues raised.

MC noted that Stakeholders might be able to add to the distribution of the Rural Residents Panel.

#### **12. Any Other Business**

GB wished to formally report the resignation of Jo Lavis earlier in 2020 from the Board of Directors. There have been no discussions yet regarding whether or not to replace her.