



MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC

STAKEHOLDER GROUP AGM On-line via Zoom

Thursday 15th October 2020, 11am – 12:30pm

MINUTES

Present:

Catriona Adams (National Federation of Women's Institutes) (CA)
Graham Biggs (Company Secretary) (GB)
Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association) (TC)
Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (MC)
Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union) (AC)
Professor Janet Dwyer (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)
Georgina Edwards (Plunkett Foundation) (GE)
Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)
Dr Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins (CCRI) (BGH)
Dr Jane Hart (RE Director) (JH)
Lizzi Hearn (CPRE - The Countryside Charity) (EH)
Nick Hubbard (CAB – Rural Issues Group) (NH)
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)
Matthew Jones (Prince's Countryside Fund) (MJ)
Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum) (HL)
Professor Alison Marshall (University of Cumbria) (AM)
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)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that at the AGM in July it had been agreed to hold another formal meeting in the Autumn focusing on project/research work rather than day-to-day issues.

1. Apologies for Absence

James Alcock (Plunkett Foundation), John Birtwistle (First Group), Daniel Carey-Dawes (CPRE – The Countryside Charity), Chris Cowcher (Plunkett Foundation), Maddy Fitzgerald (Prince's Countryside Fund), Patrick Ford (CPRE – The Countryside Charity), Keith Halstead (Prince's Countryside Fund), Chris Hinchliffe (CPRE – The Countryside Charity), Ellie Jesson (Prince's Countryside Fund)

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Attachment 1)**

Minutes of the previous meeting 07.07.2020 were accepted as a true record.

3. **Matters Arising**

There were none raised.

4. **Update on the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit launch and Net Zero Project (BW)**

BW summarised the position of both projects.

Net Zero: This project takes a rural look at the agenda for achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050 and its challenges and opportunities. The project has looked at three areas:

- a) Housing (home heating, insulation etc)
- b) Transport
- c) Energy (production & distribution)

The Rural Net Zero Inquiry draft report, prepared by Nigel Wilcock of Mickledore Consultants, is currently with the three project funding organisations for review and comment. The funders are Calor Gas, English Rural Housing Association, and the National Housing Federation.

SP was interested in linking this report into a project the NFYFC is about to launch and JD was interested to feed into work she is undertaking with DEFRA. BW confirmed that no date has been set yet for the launch of this report.

MC asked if there was an opportunity to see the report in advance and help with a dissemination plan. GB could see no reason why not, but as this is a funded project it would need all funders to agree to a wider dissemination and launch. GB was considering a Virtual Vulnerability Day in early 2021 and that could be a good opportunity for a launch if there was a broad agreement to this by the funders.

Action: BW and GB to liaise with funders and arrange a launch of the report

Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit and launch

This project has been part funded by Rural England CIC and the National Centre for Rural Health & Care (NCRHC). The on-line toolkit is designed to be used by the health and care sector at the local level and to help Local Partnerships/CCGs etc to build a rural dimension into their policy planning. There has also been secondary interest from third sector organisations in using the toolkit.

A complete draft is ready, it has been through a project reference group and the case studies have been cleared by those involved. All that remains now is for the toolkit to be tested in a "live" situation and three organisations have expressed an interest in doing this. The toolkit will be ready to launch very soon.

GB confirmed that he has been in discussion with Ivan Annibal, Operations Director at NCRHC, regarding the launch of the toolkit. Subject to Ivan's agreement, it is hoped to launch the toolkit on the 9th December at a NCRHC seminar that the Rural Services Network is hosting. The event would be split into two parts ie launch of the toolkit and presentation of a Nuffield Trust Covid rural dashboard. A soft launch of the toolkit is proposed for the week beforehand to RHCA members.

Media consultants Lexington will be used for the national launch and they have strongly advised launching in late November/early December given impending winter pressures in the NHS. They will also garner the national media attention around the launch and dissemination of the documents to MPs and senior Civil Servants.

MC noted that the toolkit has the potential to be very powerful and extremely newsworthy. Where health is not rural proofed, this could have made a difference at the beginning of the Covid-19 response. GB agreed and confirmed that health has not been rural proofed for decades. Service reconfiguration is a long-term goal and this will be a really useful tool. It is hoped that other organisations at the meeting may find this tool useful when engaging with the health and care sector. MC also noted that DEFRA is in the process of producing a monitoring report on rural proofing so this is very timely.

Action: If Ivan agrees the launch date then the RE Stakeholders will be invited to the launch on the 9th December.

5. Planning for the State of Rural Services 2021 (BW) (Attachment 2)

BW thanked the Stakeholder Group for providing an earlier helpful steer for the 2021 SORS report. Work will start in January 2021 on the report which will have a different feel to the previous two reports, at least in part, due to the pandemic and the restrictions. BW would be looking to draw on evidence/intelligence from members of the Stakeholder Group on the impact of Covid-19 and the aim is to make the 2021 SORS report a more collaborative effort than the previous reports.

BW guided everyone to point 6 of the attachment paper as it would be useful to know if the current research questions are the right ones to be asking or if any are missing: BW would also be interested in knowing:

- a) What evidence organisations already have
- b) If organisations have plans to produce any evidence by early 2021
- c) If anyone would like to be a member of the proposed project Task and Finish Group to review outputs and provide a steer.

NH recommended the CAB Transport report from 2015.

SP recommended the NHYFC's 'Covid-19 and a Post-Brexit Rural Future' due to be launched at the end of the month. It covered a range of subjects.

HL asked who would complete the proposed survey forms and how they would find out about it. BW explained that the project would be using the Rural Panel. The Panel has some 700-800 rural residents based across England who complete an annual survey.

GE noted that the Plunkett Foundation is about to publish its annual Better Business report (on community owned shops & pubs) which will incorporate Covid data. GE noted that many businesses reinvented their services eg food/prescription delivery, online services etc.

MS noted that there is good data on working from home rather than travel into work and the impact on consumer demand. He suggested that BW would need a mixture of methods to gather data. It would be useful to look at the importance of community hubs for the provision of services (see Carnegie Trust work), as well as access to digital connectivity. A question is whether different communities have the capacity to provide support. There is a lot of information on how volunteering has changed ie lots of new volunteers but will they continue?

BW agreed that it was important to capture existing and new trends and to access newly available data.

MC noted that just because something is of value does not mean it will last ie village halls, churches etc so it is important to capture the threats as well.

DW confirmed that he is happy to help from a business perspective and that a digital report published by the FSB last year may be helpful.

DE referred to DEFRA studies looking at rural people with a community perspective on economy and community. The fieldwork starts very soon and will look at how have people adapted to Covid-19. The study will hopefully be completed by August 2021 so might feed in to SORS.

RQ asked if enough time and resources had been allocated to do the SORS report justice. BW agreed that he had limited resources and that the work plan would have to fit them, but by using available data and the Panel survey it should be possible to produce something meaningful. BW thought that the write up of the project would be conducted throughout much of 2021 and new evidence could be included right

up to the summer.

MC agreed that the project will not have all the answers, but it could flag up pressure points. The report might identify some areas needing further investigation in a few years. It is about timeliness and it may be possible to narrow down the topic to use resources better.

GB agreed that this will be a very different SORS report which has more to do with “What is this telling us for the future”. We will need to think collectively about dissemination and the role for all Stakeholders to disseminate through their networks. It is the first time we have used their collective resource for research. GB advised letting other organisations go beyond the research questions (into policy) so that we do not overstep Rural England’s purpose.

TC wondered if the SORS report could tie in with Danny Kruger MP’s recent report on sustaining community spirit.

JD recommended sharing information with the Research Advisory Group on local devolution and community activity.

CA noted that she was very keen to help find information to feed into the project but unfortunately did not have the time to commit to the Task and Finish Group.

MS commented that he had recently spoken at the “Landscapes for Everyone Conference” about the Glover report and discussed vibrant communities in relation to their landscapes. Digital and housing services are high up in the Prime Minister’s thoughts so it would be worth thinking how best to frame the report.

Action: SP to send report findings to BW

Action: GE to email BW a link to the report when it is published at the end of October.

Action: DE to keep BW informed on the findings in his current studies.

Action: BW to email everyone so that they can respond directly to the requests for specific help.

Action: Rural England to set up another meeting with Stakeholders for a practical discussion about SORS in January 2021.

6. **Roundtable session - Stakeholders to provide a brief update on research/developments**

NICRE – BGH introduced herself to the group and the work that she is doing with NICRE (pronounced NICER!) – the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise . BGH is working directly with JD on this project which is funded by Research England. Four universities are involved: CCRI (Gloucestershire University), Newcastle, Warwick and the Royal Agricultural University plus Strutt and Parker and Baldwin Accountants as the founding professional business service partners. NICRE’s remit is rural enterprise and promoting diversification of rural economies. There is seed funding for innovation projects eg business networks. BGH is working at the Operational Level in the South West but would like to connect across England.

JD noted that Warwick Business School will be carrying out rural analysis of its national businesses survey data. This is a huge resource that we can learn from including the uncertainties and shocks that could face the rural economy for the next decade.

DEFRA - DE provided an update on its rural priorities and noted that the annual rural proofing statement will be published soon. The revisions will include Covid-19 and Brexit issues and that CSR has yet to be resolved so will have an impact too.

RSN – GB said that in the week beginning 19th October, the RSN along with CPRE and ERHA, would be releasing a report by Pragmatix on the fiscal case for investing in rural affordable housing. This piece of work has been commissioned to provide supporting evidence for the Treasury’s Green Book review.

The Revitalising Rural documentation is now complete and will be launched soon.

Various CSR submissions from rural interest groups have been requested by GB. He will analyse them and see if there are similar points coming through.

NRTF – HL informed the Group that the NRTF Conference was currently taking place and provided a link to it: <https://attendify.co/horizons-nrtf-conference-L6mJVgk> . With over 400 delegates, the conference is discussing future proofing, sustainability of creative industries and how we connect to communities and to those who are not digitally literate.

CCRI – JD updated the group on the rural “lived experience” study she is currently managing for DEFRA. There has been a delay to redesign protocols, reframe fieldwork and move on-line etc due to the Covid-19 situation. There are eight case study areas centred around market towns in a geographical area. Approximately 200 people will be interviewed per community. There will also be a business survey and interviews with local authority and third sector bodies. There will also be workshops.

The study will look at experience, quality of life, access to services, policy and life changes and will identify gaps in need and also identify opportunities. The first two pilot studies, Pershore and Barnard Castle, will be completed before Christmas and the other six by the end of March 2021. There may be add-on projects to undertake a “deep dive” into rural youth, gender, migrants and rural vulnerability.

University of Newcastle - MS updated the group on the project “Rural Lives on the Margins”, which has a website: <https://www.rurallives.co.uk/> The field work in Northumberland has been completed and focus groups are set up to look at impact of Covid-19 as well. The other areas are Harris and Blairgowrie in Scotland. There are plans for its launch, with Alistair Darling, of a Standard Life Foundation. This will look at economic impact, health (especially men’s health), education requirements, and the voluntary sector.

CPRE – EH reiterated the work on the report GB had previously discussed. CPRE is looking to develop this economy work with a focus on the young, employment opportunities and vulnerability. It is also working on Phase 2 of the research project on Rural Transport “deserts”, which is Transport for Quality of Life. The focus is on public transport and in particular buses and it will be launched next year. A further report is in the pipeline on Energy and is currently awaiting the Energy White Paper.

TCPA - TC has been working with the National Community Land Trust Network looking at the Planning White Paper and its radical effects on housing, landscape, sense of place, villages, social justice etc. Currently they are in the process of working out the implications.

ACRE – RQ informed the group that the ten-yearly survey on Village and Community Halls has just been published and it has been well received. It can be accessed at: <https://acre.org.uk/news/2020-10-13-extent-of-rural-economic-and-social-benefits-from-village-and-community-halls-revealed> ACRE is also working on a project with Power to Change and Sheffield Hallam University which is an update on issues for ACRE Network members and key issues for their communities. RQ will share this, as it could be helpful for the SORS and NICRE projects.

NFYFC – SP explained that in June the first part of their survey looked at a range of topics for young people. That included Covid-19 and its impact on young farmers and businesses. A new guidance paper has been produced on affordable rural housing There are links to village halls, communities, transport etc but looked at from a young person’s perspective.

MC thanked everyone for their input and noted much of the work that is happening is interlinked.

7. Any Other Business

No items were brought forward and the meeting closed at 12:30pm.