

**MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC**  
**STAKEHOLDER GROUP AGM On-line via Zoom**  
**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021, 11am – 12:30pm**  
**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Tracy Baker (National Federation of Women's Institutes) (TB)  
Graham Biggs (Company Secretary) (GB)  
John Birtwistle (First Group) (JB)  
Daniel Carey-Dawes (CPRE – The Countryside Charity) (DCD)  
Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association) (TC)  
Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (MC)  
Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union) (AC)  
Chris Cowcher (RE Director) (CC)  
Steve Dowling (Association of Convenience Stores) (SD)  
Professor Janet Dwyer (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)  
Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)  
Polly Gibb (WiRE) (PG)  
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)  
Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum) (HL)  
Clare Mills (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) (CM)  
Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)  
Richard Quallington (ACRE) (RQ)  
Ian Sherriff (Plymouth University)  
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)  
Philip Wilson (Farming Community Network) (PW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Dr Andrew Francis (National Farmers' Union), Paul Hamblin (National Parks England), Rev Claire Maxim (Arthur Rank Centre), Alison McClean, Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle)

**2. Planning Item: Future roles of Chair and Vice-Chair**

BW informed the group that both MC and RQ were looking to stand down from their respective roles in 2022 and we now need to consider who might stand from within the Stakeholder Group. MC confirmed the role was enjoyable and not onerous.

**Action:** Role Descriptions to be circulated with the minutes and if anyone is interested

then please contact BW or GB to discuss further.

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

JD nominated MC as Chair which was seconded by HL. MC proposed RQ as Vice-Chair which was seconded by IS. The group was asked for any other nominations – there were none and so both MC and RQ were re-elected without opposition.

### **4. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Attachment 1)**

Minutes of the previous meeting 14.01.21 were accepted as a true record.

### **5. Matters Arising**

There were none discussed.

### **6. RE Budget Report with actual to end June 2021 (GB) (Attachment 2)**

GB confirmed that there was nothing outstanding to report on the budget. Line 90 was showing an expected balance carried forward of £20K at the end of the current financial year. The actual balance carried forward from 31.03.21 was £32K and the majority of this relates to income from the Rural Vulnerability Research Panel and from little expenditure (due to Covid) on travel. Accounts are with TaxAssist and the formal accounts will be with Company House shortly.

### **7. Business Plan 2021/24 (Attachment 3)**

GB confirmed that the RE Business Plan has been approved for the next three years. The impact of Covid has been reflected in the Plan and in particular on its impact on timescales for delivering projects. BW and JD both confirmed this and that it was taking longer than usual to complete interviews.

RQ noted that the Business Plan was fine but that the limited capacity referred to should reflect working with others collaboratively where it adds value. IS commented that he had noticed a number of positives in diagnosing people in their own homes during the past 18 months and will be keeping an eye on changes to how services are provided. BW agreed and that last year, rather than conducting interviews face-to-face, more were done on-line, and he can see this happening again in the future. If it works, it is a more efficient and cheaper process but the concern is persuading people to speak to you through this medium.

In answer to RQ's specific comment GB thought it was more a question of looking at individual research projects and then making a decision on how to conduct the research which could include a mix of methods. RQ agreed but the main issue was one of capacity. GB commented that the RE Directors are meeting in August to discuss this further.

### **8. Rural Vulnerability Day 2021 – review of event**

MC noted that the Rural Vulnerability Day had gone extremely well, was well attended, with very good presentations and a great turnout. GB agreed and noted that it was the first time that reports produced by Stakeholders had been shared in this way and that the format worked very well. GB thanked BA for organising the event.

GB would have liked to have seen more MPs/Peers attend and possibly the event to have been an hour longer to have allowed for over-run/delays. The net zero report was

very well received as was the supporting presentation from Andy Parker (Calor). GB commented that there had been an interesting range of people on the day who we do not normally engage with.

The Government's Heat and Buildings Strategy is still delayed and we will link the net zero report into this once it has been published.

#### **9. Ongoing and Pipeline Projects (BW) (Attachment 4)**

**Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit** - BW confirmed that currently the work with Cirican has had a mixed response, with some initial success in sign up and others in the Cirican group having useful conversations, but with Covid pressures faced by local health care organisations approached limiting the take up.

BW was, however, delighted to report that he has been invited to a webinar run by the World Health Organisation to give a presentation on the toolkit as part of a rural briefing slot (which includes South Africa and Chile).

**Rural Net Zero Inquiry** – Report successfully launched at the Rural Vulnerability Day. It was a good opportunity to get some strong messages out re rural differences and challenges.

**Rural Vulnerability Research project** – An extended timescale for the interviews has been agreed with the funders until the end of July so that more interviews could take place with vulnerable people. There have been fewer interviews than we would have liked but the quality of the data is good. It has proven difficult finding people who know about the Priority Services Register, let alone register on to it. JD agreed that they are confident the report will show good results, thinking about “deep rural” and compounding factors of vulnerability, with different power sources plus low knowledge and visibility of the PSR as key issues.

**State of Rural Services 2021** – (see item 10)

**Impact of Rural Touring Arts on Loneliness, Isolation and Wellbeing** – research is on-hold while funds are hopefully raised. HL confirmed that they are looking to employ a fundraiser. The project is very relevant to the rural touring arts.

GB confirmed that two potential projects include a “pre-pipeline” budget for another report on behalf of the Rural Vulnerability Research Panel, and provision for a second report funded by Calor. Neither project has been scoped.

#### **10. State of Rural Services Report 2021 update (BW)**

BW informed everyone that the current report is very different to previous ones, focusing on pandemic impacts. It should be ready for late 2021 with a launch either side of Christmas – to be agreed. The Rural Panel Survey has now closed with approximately 600 responses from residents and BW will meet with Dr Matt Read (CCRI) shortly to discuss these. A current RSN survey is still live and has targeted the Market Towns Group. BW will then contact the project Task and Finish Group in early Autumn for comments.

**Action:** BW aim to have a draft of the report available for the Stakeholder meeting on 13.10.21

CC and JD noted that there are a number of surveys out currently and there is lower than expected uptake as people are fatigued with them and already having to spend more time on-line.

## 11. Roundtable session

**NFYFC** – SP reported that a survey has been launched on future land use. As people are a bit surveyed out currently an incentive has been added and the number of questions reduced. They are getting good numbers of responses which indicates people do want a say in their future. Further work is taking place with mental health charities on an enhanced training module.

**DEFRA** – DE reported that DEFRA is currently working on a study led by Prof Gary Bosworth looking at drivers for business formation in rural areas and how different areas have different pathways leading to higher productivity. Also looking at the movement of people to live in rural areas and why they want to. Deadline for report is autumn.

Also, launched an invitation to tender for a “Review of Rural and Urban Business Statistics” looking at the quality of statistics and what can be done to improve them or use of “greyer” statistics to inform future economic policy.

**Plunkett** – CC discussed the Better Form of Business report, which BW has used in the SORS report, which looks at the community owned pub sector, impact of Covid and the resilience of the communities and changes to services. Interest in community ownership has increased greatly in the last 18 months and a Community Ownership Fund is to be announced by Government shortly. There is interest in involving young people and recruiting them as volunteers.

Also, looking at a Social Enterprise Business Rates consultation to add perspective and lead into the Spending Review.

**Action:** CC offered to share findings to BW for SORS report.

**NFWI** – Tracy reported that a survey on the impact of Covid on well-being, loneliness and connectivity had 3,000 responses and there will be a follow up survey on connectivity and its impact. The Get on Board publication 2019 re the decline of bus services had case studies and an August 2020 survey on the availability of bus services (nearly 2,500 respondees) showed a 40% reduction in local bus availability and 46% saying access to basic services had been negatively impacted.

**ACRE** – RQ reported that there had been a good response to the latest Village Halls survey on pandemic impacts. It was helpful to have a pre-existing relationship with stakeholders when looking for responses to surveys. Also starting to look at a report into rural homelessness.

**Action:** If anyone is interested in the rural homelessness survey, contact RQ, GB or Martin Collett.

**Plymouth University**– IS reported that there had been a huge response following a request from NALC for dementia guides with a letter of support from the Prime Minister. He will do a follow up in the Autumn to see how things are progressing.

In his role as Academic Partnership Lead for the Dementia Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Plymouth, IS is producing a dementia guide for dentists. The guide will be less formal, and they are working with Tony Husband (Private Eye Illustrator) to get this out for September.

**Action:** MC asked that if anyone has information on any projects/reports/surveys etc please send to BA and she will distribute.

## **12. Any Other Business**

No other items were brought forward and the meeting closed at 12:28pm.

**Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at 11am.