

**MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC**  
**STAKEHOLDER GROUP On-line via Zoom**  
**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2022, 11am – 12:30pm**  
**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Graham Biggs (Company Secretary) (GB)  
Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association) (TC)  
Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union) (AC)  
Professor Janet Dwyer OBE (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)  
Polly Gibb OBE (WiRE) (PG)  
Nick Hubbard (Rural Issues Group CA) (NH)  
Rebecca Hyslova (Federation of Small Businesses) (RH)  
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)  
Amr Khafagy (CCRI) (AK)  
Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)  
Professor Martin Phillips (RE Research Director & University of Leicester) (MP)  
Professor Jeremy Phillipson (NICRE) (JP)  
Richard Quallington- **CHAIR** (ACRE) (RQ)  
Nahim Rahman (DeFRA) (NR)  
Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE (University of Newcastle) (MS)  
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

John Birtwistle (First Group), Margaret Clark CBE (Chair), Derek Egan (DEFRA), Jonathan Hale (RICS), Brad Taylor (CPRE), Prof Michael Winter OBE (University of Exeter)

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 11.07.22 ([See Link to Attachment 1](#))**

Minutes of the previous meeting 11.07.22 were accepted as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising**

**5) Business Plan**

GB noted that regarding the digital security item that was raised, it has been looked at by the Directors and an entry added to the Risk Register.

#### 4. **Commencing of main research project for 2022/23 – Rural Town Centres (MP)** **(See Attachment 2)**

MP thanked those who had commented on the draft project outline and from those there are some changes made mainly around bus services and young people. The project officially started on 1<sup>st</sup> October and MP has been working on the extensive quantitative analysis of the state of rural towns within England. E.g. defining a rural town, population distributions, what constitutes a market town and their size.

A Research Assistant has been appointed by Leicester University to support MP. MP also thanked those Stakeholders who had agreed to be part of the Task and Finish Group for this project.

**Action:** If anyone wishes to join the Task & Finish Group, then contact MP directly.

GB noted that there is a Rural Services Network meeting of their Rural Market Town Group on 11<sup>th</sup> October and GB will discuss the study with them and inform them that a survey may be issued to them to complete.

JP commented that the DLUHC is holding a Towns Conference in 2023. He would like to ask if they would put on a Rural Town session and draw on this research.

**Action:** MP agreed that this would be a great opportunity and JP will advise on the outcome of his discussions.

MS referenced work by Neil Power who has done a lot of [research on market towns](#). Link provided as well to a [full list of Neil's publications](#)

RQ requested, if resources allow, that the third sector be considered as part of the project because they deliver many services. MP confirmed that he was considering this. GB added that the RSN has a number of third sector bodies in membership and that if a questionnaire was appropriate, then it had a distribution network in place to disseminate it.

#### 5. **Topic specific discussion on migration/home working project (MP)**

MP, JD and Steve Emery have held some discussions on this and have agreed to apply for funding for a PhD student to undertake a project of home working via the Midlands Doctoral Training Programme. Steve Emery will draft the outline proposal by mid-November. The adverts go out in January 2023 for a student to start in October 2023 on a 3-year research project (probably with interim outputs). Just to bear in mind the application process is long and competitive so we may not be successful.

#### 6. **On-going and Pipeline Projects (See Attachment 3) (BW)**

**For information: Village/Community Agents Schemes Report (See Attachment 4)**

BW reiterated to the Group that the Rural Vulnerability Research Panel has agreed that the Village/Community Agents Schemes Report could be shared with the Stakeholders' Group but that it was not to be shared more publicly than this. NB: the schemes covered in the report are restricted to the operating areas of the four Utility companies who funded the project.

GB also confirmed that the Utility companies on the Panel are happy to have further discussions with members of the Stakeholder Group regarding the report etc.

BW updated the Group on the various projects in Attachment 3:

**Rural Town Centres project (main 2022/23 project):** discussed at Item 4.

**Follow Up to Rural Vulnerability Research project:** funded by the same grouping of four utility providers. This prospective project is a “deep-dive” into their more difficult, vulnerable customers on the Priorities Services Register and where particular rural lessons can be learned. An outline has been issued to the Panel and is awaiting their responses.

**Calor project:** GB updated the Group on the use of Calor’s funding for this year as referred to in Item 9 of the previous minutes. Kovia Consulting have been appointed to carry out the project on the social impacts for decarbonisation of off-grid gas premises and the report should be completed by the end of November.

**7. Presentation on second NICRE “State of Rural Enterprise” survey being undertaken mid-2023 by Professor Janet Dwyer (JD) ([link to presentation](#))**

JD would like some input from the Group into the second of the funded rural enterprise surveys undertaken by NICRE. The computer-assisted telephone survey is planned for early summer of 2023 and the three Universities involved, Newcastle, Warwick and Gloucester are now starting to think about the design of the survey. The focus will be on all sectors including those that are land based and also on potential and opportunities.

Discussion took place in the Group and ideas for focus included: how firms survive this winter crisis, what is it we are trying to grow e.g. the economy/social infrastructure – look at the Carnegie “seed model” of growing wellbeing, Green growth, counter political context of anti-growth analysis from government of rural areas, raise awareness in young people of career routes/training opportunities and available government/industry schemes, social integration and social impact, proportion of small, rural organisations taking up ESG kite mark, green transition, demographic transition and digital transition challenges, expenditure - how do people spend their money.

**Action:** Please contact JD if you have any other interests/ideas you would like to raise.

GB noted that 21 out of the 31 members of the Cabinet are rural MPs and that we need to ensure appropriate research reaches them and to flag up not just their cabinet responsibility but raise awareness of the research from their constituency perspective.

GB hoped that out of the survey, we may be able to pinpoint where existing government policy or process does not work in the rural context and that this would be really useful.

**8. Roundtable session**

**DEFRA – NR** reported that Defra is just completing the research studies that have been mentioned previously by Derek Egan. Defra is now considering its research priorities given the new administration and Chancellor.

**FSB – RH** reported that she is working on a Rural report looking at how we can work on existing policies to ensure they deliver in rural areas. The Defra Second Rural Proofing Report on the levelling up missions, is the backbone of key recommendations currently being looked at. It should be published by the end of year. Key areas of focus are growth and opportunities, and barriers to growth.

**Action:** If anyone wishes to feed into the report, please contact RH to arrange a meeting.

**RSN** – GB reported that the RSN published a rural [cost-of-living report](#) in September that received good national publicity. Next step could be to look at what people spend their money on. With regard to Levelling up, it is waiting to hear what the Government's next steps will be before it can progress with this and influence government thinking.

**Follow on discussions re cost-of-living crisis:**

RQ noted that ACRE is looking to link up with other organisations with regard to cost-of-living and would be very happy to link with RSN on this. Also, RQ noted that the APPG on Rural Business is launching an inquiry into the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in rural areas. Evidence has to be in by 25<sup>th</sup> November. RH commented that she had been invited to attend the first oral session and give evidence on Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> October.

**Action:** please contact RH if there is anything you would like her to raise.

MS discussed some research he had found at the ONS on [analysis of the Family Expenditure survey](#). Housing costs are typically used to determine disposable income costs rather than looking at cost differences between rural and urban. This survey looked at these costs and they were higher in rural. Another ONS paper was [Rural and urban areas: comparing lives using rural/urban classifications](#) (see in particular Figure 36). Also, MS recommended talking to Donald Hirsch, newly retired from Loughborough University, who pioneered the Minimum Income Standard the Living Wage calculations and who is looking to re-visit some of his work.

JD noted the recent DLUHC consultation on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and under-reporting of rural poverty. The Government Department wishes to set up groups to discuss this further. BW informed the meeting that RSN had responded to the Index of Multiple Deprivation consultation and a copy of that [response is here](#).

**Action:** JD has limited time and asked if anyone would like to be involved with this to share the input.

SP noted that from a young person's perspective, not only do NFYFC have concerns on rural environmental issues, cost of living, transport etc but if the family business is energy intensive then it is of serious concern for the whole family e.g. poultry business, farm shop, local employer. Plus the impact of closing down the business on the local economy.

**CA** – NH acknowledged that government interventions had slowed down the speed of the problems, but the CA is overwhelmed by the cost-of-living crisis and for the first time feels unable to offer any further support/advice, which in turn is having an effect on morale of its Advisors.

**TCPA** – TC, on behalf of the Community Land Trust, is looking at research into why people do or don't interact with community led approaches.

**NICRE** – JD reported that NICRE has been successful in gaining European funding for a Horizon project. It will be a four-year study called RUSTIC, looking at rural information and knowledge. It will be looking at the challenges of green transition, demographic transition with ageing and issues about young people and the digital transition and build on the back of good GIS based systems both in Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire for dealing with data.

**Action:** If anyone would like to be involved, then please contact JD directly.

JP reported an update on the next set of open-call projects. NICRE is hoping to fund 5 or 6 projects at a cost of £10-15K each. Topics include skills in rural enterprise, energy resilience, investment zones etc. and they are looking for consultants or research teams who have worked in these areas.

**Newcastle University** – MS reported that he has drafted a paper based on the Rural Lives work and its findings through the Covid pandemic. This considers the “perma-crisis” and redistribution of societal risk and what resilience might mean in that context. MS is also looking at the individualisation of risk for institutions that usually support people e.g. welfare, NHS being under threat. MS is working with colleagues in Sweden on a paper looking at young people who are in the “middle, educational groups” and who don’t go to university, on how they can stay in rural areas and thrive. MS is also analysing the “Understanding Society” survey and the period since the 2008 crisis. It shows the most deprived rural areas have suffered the biggest cuts from government (as have the most deprived urban areas.)

## 9. Any Other Business

### a) Dates for meetings for 2023:

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> July (AGM)

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> October

All meetings will start at 11am and be on-line.

b) GB wished to report that he and MP have been formally appointed as **Directors of Rural England CIC** and GB will continue as Company Secretary.

Meeting closed at 12:27pm.

### Date of Next Meeting:

**Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> January at 11am (on-line)**