

**MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC**  
**STAKEHOLDER GROUP On-line via Zoom**  
**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023, 11am – 12:30pm**  
**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Graham Biggs (Company Secretary/RE Director) (GB)  
John Birtwistle (First Group) (JB)  
Lord Ewen Cameron (EC)  
Margaret Clark CBE (Chair) (MC)  
Amy Cobbett (National Farmers' Union) (AC)  
Professor Janet Dwyer OBE (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)  
Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)  
Polly Gibb OBE (WiRE) (PG)  
Rebecca Hyslova (Federation of Small Businesses) (RH)  
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)  
Andy Parker (RE Director/Calor Gas Ltd) (AP)  
Professor Martin Phillips (RE Research Director & University of Leicester) (MP)  
Professor Jeremy Phillipson (NICRE) (JP)  
Richard Quallington (ACRE) (RQ)  
Avril Roberts (CLA) (AR)  
Ian Sherriff (University of Plymouth) (IS)  
Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE (University of Newcastle) (MS)  
Brad Taylor (CPRE) (BT)  
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

On behalf of the Stakeholders' Group, the Chair thanked BW for his previous role as Chair of Directors and was pleased that he was staying on as a Director of Rural England CIC.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association), Jonathan Hale (RICS), Sarah Hulme (Arthur Rank Centre), Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum), Jane Mordue (CA Rural Issues Group), Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs), Prof Michael Winter OBE (University of Exeter)

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 10.10.22 ([See Link to Attachment 1](#))**

Minutes of the previous meeting 10.10.22 were accepted as a true record.

### 3. Matters Arising

#### Rural Lives publication

MS confirmed that this work will be published on 22.02.23. [Details of publication can be found here.](#)

### 4. On-going and Pipeline Projects (BW)

BW updated the Group on the various projects:

**Follow Up to Rural Vulnerability Research project:** In the process of finalising the project brief. This is the third in the series of projects about the Utilities' Priority Services Review. The CCRI and University of Gloucestershire have agreed to do the research which is "a deep dive" on three groups of customers on the Priority Services Register who have particularly severe needs and the extent of understanding of their needs in a rural context if there is an issue with supply of gas, water, electricity. The Groups have not been identified as yet but could potentially be those with mental health issues, blind or partially sighted, and those with medical equipment which relies on energy e.g. stairlift, ventilator etc. The next meeting of the Utility Vulnerability Research Panel is on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January and once the project outline has been agreed, it will be shared with the Stakeholder Group.

**Calor project:** GB updated the Group on the work undertaken by Kovia Consulting which is being funded by Calor. Kovia Consulting have been appointed to carry out the project on the social/economic impacts for decarbonisation of off-grid gas premises and the report should be completed by mid-February. It will then be sent to Calor for signing off and the finding will be shared with the Stakeholders' Group.

**PhD application for migration/home working project into rural areas:** GB updated the Group that unfortunately, the PhD application had been unsuccessful. One option is to apply again but through a Welsh University, and the other option is to not do this as a PhD proposal. JD and MP would welcome ideas.

**Next round of potential projects 2023/24:** GB confirmed that discussions will take place at the next Directors' meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> January. Consideration would also need to take place on the timing of the next SORS report, plus possible timings of the next General Election.

### 5. Rural Town Centres project (main 2022/23 project):

#### **Link to Martin's presentation to follow**

The first phase of the project is looking at the social and economic conditions affecting rural small towns. This is an extensive phase looking at the character and challenges of small towns through existing secondary data, such as the Census and indices of deprivation. There will also be a questionnaire for those who have rural responsibilities e.g. local government (EDOs), town and parish councils etc. This phase of the research will be followed by a second, more intensive, phase involving a set of case studies that will be investigated through interviews.

MP has been working on the extensive phase which has been slightly delayed due to the complexity of the results and the release of data from the 2021 census. Much of the analysis to date had been based on the 2011 Census, but is being reworked using 2021 Census data, and an associated reclassification of built-up areas.

Initial analysis shows that some of the most deprived decile areas within the Index of Multiple Deprivations (IMD) are partly coastal communities but also ex-mining communities. These were mostly experiencing population decline between 2011 and 2021. Analysis also looked at landscapes e.g. National Parks, AONBs and age distribution. Settlements with some of the highest levels of population over-65 were in coastal communities and AONBs. MP is also looking at the proportion of middle-class residents which shows strong regional differentiation.

MP is now in the process of looking at settlements for in-depth study/case studies. The survey to EDO's will be sent out via the Rural Services Network's (RSN) principal council members. This will then inform a further survey of the RSN's Rural Market Towns Group.

Further comments and suggestions were put forward by the group and MP thanked them for their contributions and in particular any data sets – please pass these onto MP.

**Action:** MP expressed his thanks to those who have already volunteered for the Task and Finish Group and he will arrange a meeting soon. If anyone wishes to join the Task & Finish Group, then do contact MP directly. He is hoping to look at how we might do the case studies and address the comments that have been put forward at today's meeting.

**Action:** MP to email BA a copy of his presentation for distribution to the Stakeholder Group.

## 6. RSN Cost of Living Survey (GB)

Following on from a discussion at the last Stakeholders' meeting, consultants had completed work last year looking to identify areas of expenditure that were higher in rural areas compared to urban areas (and they found all areas higher in rural) Subsequently, a household cost of living survey has been developed, with the Citizens Advice Rural Issues Group, and launched on 17.01.23 via the RSN weekly Rural Bulletin. The survey closes on 31.03.2023

Response to date has surpassed expectations and GB noted that of those who have responded approximately 60% are from households earning less than the national average. MC and EC asked if any initial findings could be shared before the end of March and GB responded that he would try to pull out one or two key issues by then.

[Here is a link to the survey and article:](#)

[Here is a link to the survey only:](#)

[Here is a link to a poster on the survey with a QR code](#)

**Action:** GB asked if Stakeholders could “spread the word” regarding the survey around their own networks. The survey link is designed to be used multiple times from the same device so if there are “outreach” staff in organisations who are able to help those who are “hard to reach” complete the survey this would be invaluable help.

## 7. Roundtable session

**DEFRA** – DE noted that Defra has been inundated with work on the Rural England Prosperity Fund which includes an evaluation of the fund and in particular how it's working with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Defra is also undertaking an evaluation of the Defra grant to the ACRE network and in discussion with RQ on this.

DLUHC is undertaking a review of the IMD and Defra is holding discussions about the rural dimension to the current design and shortfalls in it. Defra is intending to provide additional funds so that so that there would be a greater account taken of rural and to explore means by which government could properly reflect the incidence of deprivation in rural areas rather than just focusing on concentration of deprivation.

Defra is also trying to forge closer relations with NICRE and had some discussions with JP re aligning policy requirements.

**NICRE** – JD thanked the Stakeholder Group for their input into the design of the second State of Rural Enterprise Survey which is now finalised and put out for tender. The survey will take place in the second quarter of 2023. Results will be reported in the third quarter of 2023. The NICRE team are working on various themes which include health and Net Zero.

JP reported on NICRE's Open Call and had approximately 20 applications. Pleased with responses and a good spread of applications across the priorities. In the process of contacting successful applicants so can't confirm who they are currently.

**Plymouth University** – IS reported that their project on putting dementia support workers in every GP practice is progressing well with an urban/rural split. It is producing some interesting data. IS has been asked to join the ISO group looking at neighbourhoods that care - not just in the UK but globally. Dementia dental guide for urban/rural dentists was well received and IS is now ensuring that every dentist has a dementia training programme in the next year (supported by the Chief Dental Officer).

**CLA** – AR reported that the APPG Rural Business and Rural Powerhouse report will be published in early March. It is based on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in rural areas. A CLA members' survey is now open on private rented sector housing and looking at trends e.g. what's been removed from the market, and where members might be trying to buy, replace or build more etc. Currently showing a similar trend to a Welsh survey: i.e. Renting Homes Wales Act, removal of minimum efficiency standards and phasing out of fossil fuels and costs associated with this. Also, reviewing the Chris Skidmore Net Zero review and undertaken an early impact assessment for rural areas – initial thoughts is that it covers most policy areas so nothing new for the CLA.

**Newcastle University** – MS reported he is reviewing a number of papers currently. One is about rural/urban poverty gap which shows that the gap has narrowed since 2010 and it is possible to map where the households are by using geographical data with the survey data. The increase in rural poverty is happening in predominantly rural areas and at a faster rate than for urban poverty. There is a statistically significant difference between the predominantly rural and the significant rural, but there is a narrowing gap between rural work poverty and urban work poverty and looking at the reasons for this which includes housing tenure and the shift into private rented sector.

MS is also reviewing a paper on Rural Resilience which asks who in the rural population is affected/most vulnerable.

**Action:** MS to send links on these papers to BA to distribute re the Group.

**FSB –** RH reported that the report she had been working on re rural economies has been written and awaiting sign off. FSB hoping to launch the report end of Feb/early March. It will include experiences of small businesses from the angle of economic growth, levelling up, Rural England Prosperity Fund etc and also barriers to growth e.g. transport, broadband, etc and it will also have new case studies.

**Action:** RH will distribute a copy of the data set once it is available.

**ACRE –** RQ reported that ACRE has had its first closure of an ACRE member in a 100 years – in Kent. Important to have an effective member in Kent so ACRE is undertaking some research to see how best Kent can be supported and deliver the Defra contract and also fulfil the requirements of being an ACRE member.

ACRE is about to conduct its State of the ACRE network survey which will provide more information on how members are doing. ACRE members utilise Defra funding to “lever in” more local funding. So for every pound Defra invests a further £7 pounds is invested at a local level.

MC noted ACRE’s comments and reflected that these highlight issues regarding support organisations in rural areas, who do not necessarily deliver frontline services but intermediate/infrastructure support. This may be an area of work to look at their vulnerability.

MC thanked everyone for their input today and also noted that there is a lot of research being undertaken and it would be good to see if there are any common threads coming out of them.

MC confirmed that the AGM in July will be her last meeting as Chair and that also RQ is standing down as Vice-Chair. GB asked if anyone would like to stand as Chair or Vice-Chair then please do contact him.

## **8. 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.

Meeting closed at 12:30pm.

### **Date of Next Meeting:**

**Monday 10th July (AGM) at 11am (on-line)**