



MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC

STAKEHOLDER GROUP On-line via Zoom

Monday 6th November 2023, 11am – 12:30pm

MINUTES

Present:

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker)
Graham Biggs (Company Secretary & Chair) (GB)
Lord Ewen Cameron (EC)
Margaret Clark CBE (MC)
Professor Janet Dwyer OBE (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)
Polly Gibb (WiRE) (PG)
Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum) (HL)
Jane Mordue (CA – Rural Issues) (JM)
Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)
Professor Jeremy Phillipson (NICRE) (JP)
Professor Martin Phillips (RE Research Director & University of Leicester) (MP)
Suzanne Plamping (NFWI) (SPI)
Ian Sherriff (University of Plymouth) (IS)
Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle) (MS)
Brad Taylor (CPRE) (BT)
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)

Graham Biggs, the acting Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting

1. Apologies for Absence

John Birtwistle (First Group), Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association), Jonathan Eastwood (TNL Community Fund), Derek Egan (DEFRA), Jo Hobbs (British Youth Council). Richard Quallington (ACRE)

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 10.07.23 ([See Link to Attachment 1](#))

Minutes of the previous meeting 19.01.23 were accepted as a true record.

3. Matters Arising

8) Roundtable Session (NICRE)

MC asked if there was an update on the NICRE project re the “language/terminology used to frame rural issues and what connects with people” due end of 2023. MC felt this was becoming even more important as we approach a general election.

Action: JP to pick up this action point and seek an update on the 'Framing' project led out of RAU.

4. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair ([Description of Roles -see link to Attachment 2](#))

This item will be a standing item on the agenda. GB has not received any formal nominations and asked all those present if anyone wished to put themselves forward.

There were no nominations.

As agreed at the last meeting, the Directors of Rural England CIC will chair the Stakeholder meetings on a rota basis depending on availability.

Action: To continue to keep this as a regular Agenda item until the roles are filled.

5. Update on On-going and Pipeline Projects

(b) Work for Utility Companies on the Priority Services Register (GB)

GB explained that a full draft report had been considered at the recent Utility Companies' meeting. The report was regarded as being very thorough. The report was also shared with the Directors at their meeting the following day.

The report authors, CCRI, are now producing an Executive Summary and a summary of recommendations with some reframing to differentiate between recommendations and actions for the sector, government, and other bodies. Once this has been completed, and the report signed off, it will be shared with the Stakeholder Group.

Action: Report to be circulated to Stakeholders once signed off and included on the next Stakeholder meeting agenda.

6. Future Projects for 2023 and into 2024

(a) State of the Rural Services Report (draft project brief to follow)

It has been agreed that the preparation for the SORS report will be brought forward and for the report to be completed by September/October 2024. The focus of the report will be on specific services, as in previous reports, and will provide information on whether services have improved or have become more difficult to provide etc.

Action: Project Brief once agreed by Directors to be circulated to Stakeholders for comment.

(b) Resilience of the Rural Electricity Networks to Meet Net Zero (draft project brief to follow)

An outline brief has been considered by the Directors at their recent meeting. The work has not been commissioned yet, but it has been agreed in principle that the CCRI will undertake this. The CCRI have been asked to prepare a fuller outline with timelines and to include where they would get their expert opinion from. It is important that a starting point is the current capacity of the electricity network in terms of serving rural areas and the vulnerability of the network in particular to extreme weather conditions.

The Second part of the brief will be adaptations required from rural residents and businesses to adapt these technologies such as changes to mobility, retro-fitting properties, or alterations to amenities such as landscape.

JD noted that this could be a potential project of interest for NICRE to co-fund and will discuss this further with NICRE Directors. MC agreed that this was a very important project and that it would be good to have other partners and more money to do this. MC noted that there are different points of time that will also have an impact i.e., 2030, 2035 and 2050. GB agreed with these comments and that a full brief was needed.

(c) Work for Utility Companies – verbal update.

GB informed the meeting that at the recent Utility meeting, the utility companies were

asked if they had any ideas for their next project. They haven't yet and have gone away to consider this.

9. Any Other Business

- a) GB informed the meeting that (PG) had very recently been appointed as a Director for Rural England CIC and welcomed her to the Board. PG thanked GB and said that she was looking forward to being a Director and working with the Stakeholders in the future.

5. Update on On-going and Pipeline Projects

(a) Rural Towns Project (MP) ([link to presentation](#))

MP talked through his presentation - please see the link above for the detail which also included festival economies and expanding tourism season etc. There was discussion around funding for towns and events which seemed to focus more on the principal local authority level.

MP noted that there are some towns that are looking at the high-tech employment route and/or link to net zero and want to attract professional commuting into the town and an opportunity start developing more high-tech industry and also link to local universities or educational establishments. HL commented that her town of Newbury successfully did just this with Vodafone and it created a secondary spend in local businesses.

HL offered to have an in-depth chat with MP re the festival economies as she has done a lot of work/research in this area. JD wondered if some of the Stakeholder Group could canvass views on some of these more qualitative issues and questions, if MP was able to circulate a set of themes on which he would value some views.

Action: A Stakeholder meeting will be called on 18th January 2024 to consider the reports at 5a, 5b and 6b. More details to follow

7. Roundtable session

National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs – SP commented that they had recently published the [NFYFC Sustainable Futures report](#) (in response to the [NFY FC Route to Success research project](#) and working closely with Lantra.)

NICRE – JD reported that there will be a launch of the series of State of Rural Economy Surveys at the end of November. The event will be at the Shard, London. The surveys look at challenges and opportunities arising from the cost-of-living changes but also around innovation and growth in rural enterprise for businesses in the North-East, Midlands and South West.

JP added the following to the chat “NICRE State of Rural Enterprise reports: Cost of business; Skills and Labour availability; Environmental impacts; Rural Opportunities; and thematic farm reports.” JP is keen to work with Rural England CIC and how NICRE's work could relate to the SORS 24 report. GB agreed with this and asked JP to contact him outside of the meeting.

Also, practice partners, Stratton Parker have raised with JD their concerns related to the way the Levelling Up Fund is being targeted and about what they identify as a lack

of a strategic approach.

Action: If other Stakeholders have any specific concerns as well then please let JD know.

CA Rural Issues Group – JM commented that CA is working on the Local Housing Allowance and that it has been frozen since 2019, fallen behind inflation and that no-one is taking into account for those living in rural areas as the LHA is calculated in towns and on town prices.

Newcastle University – MS reported that some of his research has been published in regional studies. (“The rural–urban poverty gap in England after the 2008 financial crisis: exploring the effects of budgetary cuts and welfare reforms”). The [link is here and it's open access, so free to access](#)

University of Plymouth – IS informed the Group that the [APPG report Raising the Barriers to diagnosing dementia in England](#) has now been published. It looked at people’s experience in rural areas, including the farming community, as on average it’s taking up to two years to have a diagnosis and there are approximately 257K people waiting for that diagnosis.

CPRE – BT commented that the latest CPRE report will be published at the end of the month on the State of Rural Affordable Housing. BT will share the report once it is available.

National Rural Touring Forum – HL added a couple of links into the Chat as an “example of a regional Festival network hub across the country - <https://eafn.co.uk/> And a small exploration into why Rural touring is a greener / more sustainable way of touring than urban <https://www.ruraltouring.org/news/environmental-action/> “

Action: If Stakeholders have any links to their reports, then please email them to BA at bethan.aldridge@sparse.gov.uk

8. Dates for 2024 meetings

Thursday, 18th January 2024 11am-12:30pm

Monday, 8th July 2024 11am-12:30pm

Monday, 7th October 2024 11am-12:30pm

RE Directors will be organising a UKRPPRG meeting in early 2024. Date and location TBC.

9. Any Other Business

(b) IS asked, on behalf of Johnny Mercer MP, if there is any data on veterans and how many of them live in our rural communities. Veterans will be asked to self-declare to their GPs as it’s difficult to access information on veterans’ health.

Action: IS to ask Johnny Mercer MP to email GB directly.

(c) Will there be another Census? MC raised this and BW expressed his concern with how Defra would collate the geographical data, household information etc on rural areas without the census data.

Meeting closed at 12:27pm.

Date of Next Meeting:

Thursday, 18th January 2024 11am-12:30pm
on-line via Zoom

To book your place at the January meeting, please click on the Eventbrite link [here](#):