



RURAL ENGLAND C.I.C

WORKING TO BENEFIT THE STAKEHOLDER GROUP AND RURAL ENGLAND C.I.C.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to review the objectives and operation of the Stakeholder Group of Rural England CIC. It is several years since this was last considered. In that time a major change has been that all meetings are now conducted by Zoom.

Rural England Directors are extremely grateful to all Stakeholders for their on-going support and wish to operate in a way that is beneficial both to Stakeholder members and Rural England CIC.

This paper sets out our current thinking on the benefits to both RE CIC and Stakeholder members, and the operation of the meetings.

As a member of the Stakeholder Group, you are invited to consider this review and propose any changes or improvements to any part of this paper and proposals.

Section A:

Proposals:

- 1) That the duties and obligations set out for the stakeholder group be replaced by a statement of benefits: Learn, Share, Influence. **(see section B)**
- 2) That Rural England CIC continues to convene bi-annual Stakeholder Group meetings.
- 3) That the agenda of Stakeholder Group meetings be designed to enable **Learning** (from each other and RE CIC), **Sharing** (updates from Stakeholders), and **Influence** (round-table discussion and input from stakeholders to the work of RE CIC).
- 4) That Stakeholder Group members are invited to the annual UK Higher Education and Policy Practitioners seminar event hosted by RE CIC.

Section B

Stakeholder Group brings value to Rural England CIC:

A Stakeholder Group has been in operation **(see Appendix A for some background)** from the very beginning of the Company's work, bringing considerable value to the Company's work by:



- Providing an update on research and campaigning work being undertaken by their organisation relevant to the work/objects of Rural England.
- Alerting Directors and other Stakeholders to policy changes and challenges that are relevant to the well-being of rural areas.
- Offering, where appropriate, access to data or research that has been undertaken by the stakeholder organisation relevant to the work/objects of Rural England
- Providing support for individual pieces of research undertaken by Rural England, which may include the following:
 - ❑ Assist in the selection of external consultants if they are commissioned to undertake research on behalf of Rural England
 - ❑ Membership of project/research steering groups
 - ❑ Peer review of work undertaken by or on behalf of Rural England
- Through their networks promoting the work of Rural England

The Benefits of being a Member of the Stakeholder Group

The benefits to organisations which are supportive of the work of the Company of being members of a Stakeholder Group can be expressed as an opportunity to:

**Learn,
Share,
Influence.**

Learning is not just relating to the work of Rural England. At each meeting of the Group there should continue to be a Roundtable Session inviting members to present to the meeting details on research/development underway, recently completed or in contemplation. So, a fairly comprehensive picture of activity relevant to rural areas.

In addition, there is the opportunity to use data and research provided by Rural England in your organisation's work to promote the well-being of rural area (subject to report on its use and outcomes.)

Sharing is clearly related to the Learning point above but in sharing your organisation's activities it is often the case that other members of the Group can offer support or guidance to that work including referencing other work/data which may be relevant. There is also the opportunity to support your own organisation's networks through the dissemination of the work of Rural England

Influencing in the main relates to the opportunity to influence the work of the Company itself. The Group helps shape the work programme of the Company.



Research proposals are wherever possible put to the Stakeholder Group for comment before they proceed. Through the Roundtable sessions referred to above there is also a chance to inform/influence the work of other organisations in membership of the Stakeholder Group.

Directors are extremely grateful to members of the Stakeholder Group for their support and involvement. We are keen to ensure that stakeholder members gain benefit and value from attending meetings. We invite your comments.

Graham Biggs
Chair of Directors – Rural England CIC

24th June 2024



APPENDIX A

(a) The 'Objects' of Rural England Community Interest Company (The Company)

The Objects of the Company are expressed in Article 2, which states:

“The objects of the Company are to carry on activities including, without limitation, research and data analysis, which benefit the well-being of the community and in particular to improve services, access to services and access to information; primarily in rural areas of England but also in respect of other parts of the United Kingdom if the Company so decides.”

In our research reports etc we describe ourselves as follows:

“Rural England CIC is a not for dividend organisation with any surpluses re-invested in meeting the Company’s Objectives. Its mission is to build the strength and resilience of rural England by helping to inform and engender better rural policy making. It does this by encouraging informed debate, providing independent research and evidence, supporting informed information exchange, and building a network that draws together all those who seek to sustain and improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of rural England. The prime focus of the company is on research to further the understanding of issues affecting people, businesses, and communities in rural areas of England that will provide objective evidence to inform and influence policy and policymakers.”

(b) Provision for there to be a Stakeholder Group

The Articles of Association of the Company make provision for the operation of a Stakeholder Group. Article 38 states:

“ARTICLE 38: STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The Company may create and support Stakeholder/User Group(s) the purpose of which will be to add value to the workings of the Company in pursuit of its main objects.

The Stakeholder group(s) will meet at least annually to receive reports on the working of the Company and to comment on its activities.

Stakeholder group meetings will be attended by at least one director of the Company who will feed back the views of the meeting to the Board of Directors and the members.”

The current membership of the Stakeholder Group is set out in **Appendix B.**



APPENDIX B: MEMBERSHIP OF THE STAKEHOLDER GROUP 1ST APRIL 2024

- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
- Age UK
- Arthur Rank Centre (Germinate)
- Association of Convenience Stores (ACS)
- British Youth Council
- Calor Gas Ltd
- CPRE The Countryside Charity
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Citizen's Advice Bureau - Rural Issues Group
- Countryside Alliance
- Countryside and Community Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire
- Country Land and Business Association
- Farming Community Network
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Local Government Information Unit
- Locality
- National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
- National Association of Local Councils
- National Farmers' Union
- National Federation of Women's Institutes
- National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs
- National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise
- National Lottery Community Fund
- National Parks England
- National Rural Touring Forum
- National Trust
- Plunkett Foundation
- Royal Countryside Fund
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- Rural Services Network
- Town and Country Planning Association
- University of Cumbria
- University of Plymouth
- UK Youth
- Women in Rural Enterprise (WIRE)



- Lord Cameron of Dillington
- Former commissioners / officers from the Commission for Rural Communities:
 - Margaret Clark CBE
 - Alison McLean OBE
 - Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE
 - Professor Michael Winter OBE
 - Professor Sheena Asthana
 - Rachel Purchase

DEFRA attend meetings as observers

APPENDIX C: Invitation to discuss operation of the Stakeholder Group

A new Director, Polly Gibb a member of the Stakeholder Group representing WIRE, agreed to ask for views from other Group members. In March we sent out the following e mail on Polly's behalf:

"If you have any thoughts on the RE Stakeholder Group or suggestions for change – I would love to hear from you!

I've recently become a RE CIC Director, prior to which I attended the RE Stakeholder Group online meetings – as a stakeholder. Although I found the meetings interesting, I was never quite sure what they were for or what my role was. So, I'm doing a quick-and-dirty look at how the Stakeholder Group works and whether we can make it more useful or effective for its members."

Polly has spoken to a few Stakeholder Group members and their comments are, we hope, reflected in this review.

Those spoken to were happy with the current level of engagement and found the updates at meetings on Rural England Research, and particularly the round table of reports from other members of the Group. the most interesting and informative.

The Group is asked to consider if it agrees with the views set out above.