



**MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC**  
**STAKEHOLDER GROUP AGM On-line via Zoom**

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2024, 11am – 12:30pm**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Graham Biggs (Chair of Directors and Company Secretary) (GB)  
Kerry Booth (Rural Services Network) (KB)  
Margaret Clark CBE (MC)  
Professor Janet Dwyer OBE (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)  
Derek Egan (DEFRA) (DE)  
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)  
Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs) (SP)  
Professor Martin Phillips (RE Research Director & University of Leicester) (MP)  
Professor Jeremy Phillipson (NICRE) (JP)  
Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle) (MS)  
Brad Taylor (CPRE) (BT)  
Mark Thomas (Farming Community Network) (MT)  
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)  
Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

The Chair for this meeting, BW, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Lord Ewen Cameron, Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association), Polly Gibb (WiRE & RE Director), Rev. Sarah Hulme (Arthur Rank Centre)

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 06.11.23 ([See Link to Attachment 1](#))**

Minutes of the previous meeting 06.11.23 were accepted as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising**

**Minute 5: Work for Utility Companies on the Priority Services Register (BW)**

[\(See Link to Completed Report Attachment 2\)](#) As agreed, the final version of the report was circulated to the Group. This was a deep dive into three specific needs categories on the Register. Thanks were given to the CCRI team, and particularly Fred Dunwoodie-Stirton.

**Action:** This report will be presented at the next Rural Vulnerability Day.

**Minute 6 (b): Resilience of the Rural Electricity Networks to Meet Net Zero (Verbal report GB)** It was noted that CCRI have been asked to prepare a fuller outline and it was hoped that the "expert opinion" would be secured swiftly so that the project can be signed off by October 2024 at the latest. NICRE has agreed to match fund the research and JP

added that the funding will need to be allocated before January 2025.

**Action:** Circulate brief to Stakeholders when agreed.

**Action:** If Stakeholders have any data/information that may be of use for the project, then please let GB or MP know and also if they wish to be part of a Task and Finish Group for this project.

#### 4. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

BW noted that that there had not been any nominations and asked all those present if anyone wished to put themselves forward. There were no nomination and as previously agreed, by the Directors, they will take it in turns to attend the Stakeholder meetings to act in the role of Chair.

BW requested that if anyone would like to find out more about these roles, then they should contact GB directly

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

#### 5. RE Budget with actual to 30th June 2024 (GB) [\(See Link to Attachment 3\)](#)

GB highlighted the importance of separating current year income and expenditure from funding generated in previous years. He reported a loss of funding from a previous core funder, First Group, due to personnel changes, resulting in a £7K annual reduction in income. Despite this, GB confirmed that the company was in a good financial position and anticipated future stability subject to not losing further support of any substance.

JD raised the idea of considering income generation through joint funding projects and exploring the potential of crowdfunding for future sustainability. SP and MC shared their positive experiences with collaborative bids and emphasised the value of finding the right partners. GB suggested that this situation presented an opportunity to reconsider the organisation's research strategy and seek funding through partnerships.

**Action:** It was agreed to discuss this proposal further at the next Directors' meeting re the potential for developing a desired research programme and seeking funding and partnerships for it.

#### 6. Roundtable session

**NFYFC** – SP updated the Group on a recently completed project “How Farming can cool the Planet” looking at how farmers can be part of the solution and not the problem regarding tackling climate change. SP also emphasised the importance of volunteers and the work that young people do in their own rural communities. A potential project may be to look at the importance of youth work provision in rural areas.

**Farming Community Network** – MT commented on research that FCN has undertaken with Exeter University on [loneliness and isolation in rural areas](#). Much of FCN's support work is regarding financial concerns (the changes to farming subsidies and support from banking institutions as a result of this), also family relationships and health concerns both physical and mental. [FCN has also teamed up with Macmillan Cancer Support](#) to connect rural communities with cancer support resources.

**Rural Coalition** – MC informed the Group that Pragmatix Advisory has just completed some work looking at rural productivity. It highlighted the potential economic benefits of investing in the rural economy from £9bn up to £19bn. The report is aimed at the Treasury and relevant government ministers. It has not yet been published.

**NICRE** – JD provided an update including the publication of several reports and the ongoing work on social value measurement. Contact JD directly to find out more on this. JP emphasised the significance of the [State of Rural Enterprise survey and reports](#). JP highlighted the proactive approach taken by the Northeast Combined Authority in incorporating a rural lens into their devolution deal, which could serve as a model for other regions.

**Leicester University** – MP invited the Stakeholders to the [Land Use for Net Zero Hub's Big Tent](#) event in Edinburgh. The focus is on land use and net zero transitions.

**Newcastle University** – MS discussed his ongoing work, including his book on [Rural Poverty Today - Experiences of Social Exclusion in Rural Britain](#)

**Rural Services Network** – KB shared her involvement in a research project on potential innovative rural transport solutions eg drones, pilotless flights, EC tolls etc. Contact KB directly for further information. She will also be re-forming the APPG on Rural Services now that the election is over.

**DEFRA** – DE confirmed that an updated rural research strategy has been completed but was waiting for the new government's direction before publication.

DE also reported on ongoing research plans to demonstrate the importance of government-funded capacity for rural organisations, with a report expected to be published later in the summer. The second project evaluates the Rural England Prosperity Fund, taking a broader approach to assess wider challenges faced by rural businesses.

The third project develops a rural growth toolkit to identify performance variations in rural areas and potential intervention strategies. Lastly, DE mentioned ongoing work to review the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) application in rural areas to better allocate resources.

**CPRE** - BT mentioned that CPRE was developing an urban related report and that would be shared with the Stakeholders later in the year.

**National Centre for Rural Health & Care** – GB, with his NCRHC Director's hat on, commented on the National Centre's work on a rural NHS/Social Care workforce toolkit. The Board is meeting, (10<sup>th</sup> July), to discuss this and a Steering group for this project has been established.

## 7. Update on On-going and Pipeline Projects

### (a) Draft Project Brief for Vulnerability Research Panel ([See Link to Attachment 4](#))

BW presented a project brief for the Vulnerability research panel (which has now been signed off), and will examine rural households' actions to reduce energy and water usage.

**Action:** Stakeholders to forward on any research/information that would be of assistance and any comments to GB and MP.

**(b) SORS 2024 Research Brief ([See Link to Attachment 5](#))**

MP presented the brief and invited feedback on potential areas of focus. Discussion ensued and the following was considered:

**Action:** MP to consider including mobile connectivity deterioration and explore the possibility of including welfare services access in the State of Rural Services 2024 report.

**Action:** MP to consider the changes in context when analysing Census 2021 data, particularly in rural areas.

**Action:** GB to organise another Stakeholder Group meeting to review the draft SORS report before publication.

**Action:** Stakeholders to send any relevant reports or data to MP.

**(c) Rural Town Centres Overview Report (MP) ([See Link to Attachment 6](#))**

**NB: There is a link from this Overview Report to the Full Report**

**NB: This report is EMBARGOED until its official launch in September 2024**

MP highlighted key findings from the Overview report, including issues of deprivation, inequalities within small rural towns, and the challenges of declining household sizes but the increase in the numbers of households. MP also discussed the increase in use of private transport, economic changes and festival economies. He also touched on the potential of a green growth agenda for small rural towns in light of the changing climate.

BW and GB discussed the upcoming launch of the full report which is aimed at policymakers. The plan is to hold a Vulnerability Day in mid-September or after the party conference season. They are considering the issues of engaging current politicians and aiming for wider participation and media coverage.

**Action:** Rural England Directors to consider the timing of the Rural Vulnerability Day.

**Action:** BA to circulate the date for Rural Vulnerability Day once confirmed.

**8. Operation of the Stakeholder Group report (PG) ([See Link to Attachment 7](#))**

GB shared a report that PG and he had written in regard to the operation of the Stakeholder Group. GB and PG proposed a restatement of its purpose to ensure it benefits both individual members and Rural England. They agreed on the importance of reporting discussions to the wider group and allowing feedback between meetings.

**Action:** BA to add Newcastle University to the list of Stakeholders in Appendix B.

**Action:** GB and PG to review Margaret's comments about stakeholder group interaction between meetings.

**Action:** GB to ensure Task and Finish group discussions are communicated to the wider Stakeholder Group between meetings.

**9. Any Other Business**

Meeting closed at 12:50pm.

**Date of Next Meeting:**

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at 11am – 12:30pm**

(Round table session) and on-line via Zoom

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