



## MEETING OF RURAL ENGLAND CIC

### STAKEHOLDER GROUP AGM On-line via Zoom

Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October 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)  
Amy Cobbett (NFU) (AC)  
Professor Janet Dwyer OBE (RE Director & CCRI) (JD)  
Polly Gibb (RE Director & WIRE) (PG) (CHAIR of meeting)  
David Inman (RE Director) (DI)  
Holly Lombardo (National Rural Touring Forum) (HL)  
Jane Mordue (Citizens Advice (Rural Issues Group) (JM)  
Professor Martin Phillips (RE Research Director & University of Leicester) (MP)  
Professor Jeremy Phillipson (NICRE) (JP)  
Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle) (MS)  
Amy Smith (National Rural Touring Forum) (AS)  
Brad Taylor (CPRE) (BT)  
Brian Wilson (RE Director) (BW)  
Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

#### **Invited Speaker**

Mark Pragnell (Pragmatix Advisory) (MPr)

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

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Lord Ewen Cameron, Trevor Cherrett (Town & Country Planning Association), Rev. Sarah Hulme (Arthur Rank Centre), Tim Jones (South West LEP), Sheena Asthana (Plymouth University), Kayleigh Wainwright (UK Youth), Amy Garnham (Child Poverty Action Group), Duncan Carter (Calor), Helen Williams (Locality), Steve Emery (RE Director), Sophie Howes (Child Poverty Action Group), Prof Michael Winter (Exeter University), Keith Halstead (Royal Countryside Fund), Patrick Begg (National Trust), David Murphy (University of Cumbria), Mark Thomas (Farming Community Network), Corrine Pluchino (ACRE), Sarah Palmer (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs), Graeme Willis (CPRE), Derek Egan (DEFRA)

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting 08.07.24 ([See Link to Attachment 1](#))**

Minutes of the previous meeting 08.07.24 were accepted as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising**

There were none.

**4. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair ([See link to Attachment 2](#))**

PG 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.

PG 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. Presentation by Mark Pragnell, Managing Director, Pragmatix Advisory on the "[Reigniting rural futures](#)" [Summary Report](#) commissioned by the Rural Coalition ([Link to Press Release](#))**

MPr worked through a PowerPoint presentation and provided an overview of the Summary Report. [See link to presentation.](#)

The report was commissioned by the Rural Coalition to present an economic case for investing in rural areas, particularly to the Treasury. MPr, MD of Pragmatics Advisory, emphasised the importance of rural areas in the UK's economic strategy and the need for a "rural offer" to the new government. He stressed the importance of demonstrating the economic benefits of investing in rural communities and referenced the roadmap for change produced by the Rural Coalition. The report aims to shift the debate from a focus on farming and land-based sectors (important though they are) to the broader rural economy.

The report considered three scenarios for rural growth and concluded that even if rural areas only grew at the same rate as non-rural areas, it would result in a significant increase in the size of the rural economy. MPr noted that improving rural productivity could lead to substantial increases in tax revenues for the Treasury and emphasised the potential for growth and improvement in rural areas within the right policy framework.

The Group discussed the need for a more equitable distribution of funds across the country, particularly in rural areas. The participants discussed the importance of presenting this in a more compelling way to Government, especially in light of the green agenda and post-Covid economic shifts. They also touched on the challenge of convincing the Treasury to allocate funds for rural development, with suggestions for better collaboration and leveraging existing funds more effectively.

**Action:** Rural Coalition to circulate the summary report to all rural MPs & Secretary of States.

**Action:** Rural Coalition to engage with the Treasury to discuss the economic potential of rural areas.

**Action:** Rural Services Network to develop briefing notes for rural MPs on key rural issues.

## 6. Any updates from Rural England on work in progress

GB updated the group on ongoing projects, including the Annual Rural Vulnerability Day which will take place on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> November. There are two parts to the day, a Parliamentary Launch from 9:30am for Parliamentarians only and the General Launch at 11am and to which everyone will be invited to. At the Vulnerability Day, the Towns report and the Priority Services Register Code Group Report will both be launched.

- a) Project work for the Rural Vulnerability Group by MP looking at people's attitude to energy and water conservation,
- b) A proposal from CCRI to explore challenges of electrification of rural areas (to be signed off by Directors),
- c) SORS24 report is in the final stages of completion. It is hoped that the report will be launched at the Vulnerability Day either fully or a substantial overall summary statement will be provided.

## 7. Any items arising from the Party Conferences.

The National Rural Touring Forum went to the Labour Party Conference. HL gave a link to the NRTF newsletter on their 'rural' take away: <https://www.ruraltouring.org/news/labour-party-conference-cultural-and-rural-round-up>

## 8. Roundtable Session - Stakeholders to provide a brief update on research/developments

**NRTF** – HL explained that her organisation is funded by the Arts Council and represents rural arts across the country. They currently have two ongoing projects: a research project about the positive effects of rural touring and arts on loneliness and isolation, and a project called 10,000 Spaces, which aims to represent the 10,000 village halls in the country. HL also discussed growth in their organisation, which includes the development of a rural press agency for their members, and anyone else to use. They will be creating a rural press list and also provide a service for press release writing and advocacy. She highlighted the challenges small organisations face in marketing and advocacy, and the role of arts in community cohesion and wellbeing.

**RSN** – KB informed the Group that the APPG for Rural Services held its inaugural meeting in September and has re-formed. Sarah Dyke MP for Glastonbury & Frome is the elected Chair. The priorities for the APPG over the next 12 months are: Rural Fair Funding of Public Services, Rural Economy (with a focus on growth and skills), Rural Transport, Rural Affordable Housing, and Rural Health and Care.

**DEFRA** – GB read out the information supplied by DE:

- We have commissioned Ipsos to conduct an interim evaluation of the REPF which will look at the effectiveness of the administrative processes and also whether supported projects seem likely to deliver positive impacts. However, we are also using the study to explore what other government interventions could contribute to rural economic development (aside from the REPF's focus on providing capital grants).
- We are now focusing on preparations for the Spending Review/Budget. Funding is tight but are working on making a strong case for investing in rural research and analysis, including how such evidence can support the delivery of the Government's Missions across rural areas.

**NICRE** – JD discussed the outreach events to develop the rural research agenda for the next five years and emphasising the need for strategic development in market towns. JP announced a new project with Innovate UK, aiming to improve the innovation system's reach in rural areas.

**Rural England CIC** – GB explained that Rural England would look to review and respond to upcoming government consultations and policy proposals. It would provide a “rural” look at those that the RSN respond to and send these to Stakeholders for comment where time permits. The RSN currently does some of this through its [“Rural Lens” documents](#).

**CA – Rural Issues Group** – JM commented that a recent report (Sept 2023) on domestic violence from Devon and Cornwall Citizens Advice, had led to improved training for the police and better use of data. [Link here to report](#).

**9. Dates for 2025 Meetings:**

Thursday, 23rd January 2025 (TBC)	11am-12:30pm
Monday, 7th July 2025	11am-12:30pm
Monday, 6th October 2025	11am-12:30pm

The dates in July and October were confirmed.

The January date is still to be confirmed and a meeting may be called with the UK RPPRG and possibly slightly later in 2025.

**10. Any Other Business**

Meeting closed at 12:26pm.