

Notes of Discussions

Rural Commission

17 March 2009

Local Government House, Smith Square, London at 11.15 am

The list of those present is **attached** as an Appendix to these Notes.

1. Chairman's Welcome

Cllr Andrew Bowles, welcomed members and speakers to the Rural Commission meeting.

Members noted apologies from Tim Crosier, Senior Policy Analyst, Cabinet Office and Hilary Mansfield, Special Adviser, Age Concern England who were to give a presentation on "*Older People and Rural Exclusion*" but could not attend due to ill-health.

Action: Officers to re-arrange the Session on "*Older People and Rural Exclusion*".

The Chairman reminded members to attend the Rural Commission/Conference on 8/9 September which would be held in Cambridge.

Members were encouraged to attend the LGA Flood Conference – "*Taking the Lead on Local Flood Risk Management*" which will take place on 29 April at the Cavendish Conference Centre, chaired by Cllr Paul Bettison, Chairman, LGA Environment Board. Details can be accessed at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/events/display-event.do?id=1411863>

The Chairman informed members that Cllrs Pat Aston (Kerrier DC) and Neil Burden (North Cornwall DC), Deputy Leaders of the Rural Commission would no longer be Councillors from the 1st April due to local authority reorganisation in Cornwall. The Chairman, on behalf of members, thanked Cllrs Aston and Burden for their hard work and contributions to the Rural Commission and Policy Review Group.

2. *Promoting Sustainable Economic Well-being: Spreading Best Practice*

Roger Turner (Programme Manager, Rural Economies, Commission for Rural Communities) gave a presentation on the CRC's work to identify recession-busting policies in rural areas. He pointed out that some of the issues being reported in urban areas were also present in the rural economy and, that the rural economy was more complex than had previously been thought.

Johanna Davies (Senior Policy Officer Commission for Rural Communities) introduced CRC's project on *Sustainable Economic Well-being: Spreading Good Practice* which

was developed to highlight good practise being undertaken by local authorities.

Cllr Ray Ellis (Hampshire CC) gave a background on the key issues identified by his authority. He suggested that for any rural community to be sustainable there was a need for infrastructure; partnership working; better co-ordination between local authority departments and the need for a mechanism to be put in place for the delivery of joint projects.

Frances Stokes (Business Development Manager, Hampshire CC) outlined a number of business support programmes that Hampshire CC had identified to help businesses through the recession. She gave a case study example on how a small village in East Hampshire saved its shop from closure through the diversification of the services that it provided.

John Wellbank (Managing Director, Rural Futures) discussed the economic situation facing rural businesses. He pointed out that although farming is important in rural areas; rural business was not limited to agriculture.

Following the presentations, members made the following comments:

- Concern was expressed over the cost of promoting and supporting village shops. There was a need to identify other sources of funding and also to encourage shop owners to look for alternative markets.
- Local authorities working in partnership with relevant agencies are best placed to prioritise the processes that work best for the specific areas.
- Encouraging saving can help create vibrant rural economies.
- The Rural Development Programme for England should be simplified and easily accessible. The role of local authorities in speeding up the access to the RDPE is crucial.
- The impact of business rate rises and empty business property rates needs addressing. The CRC noted that they were undertaking work in this area.
- Loss of talented people in rural areas as high value added jobs are forced into towns and cities, partly because of lack of public transport; this needs urgent attention.
- The Chair added that the issue of rural broadband access had been considered at the meeting he had with Defra Minister Huw Irranca-Davies MP. It was hoped that this would be the subject of discussion at a future Commission meeting

3 Government Response to the Pitt Review of the summer 2007

Chris De Grouchy (Head of Flood and Management, Defra) gave a presentation on the issues arising from the Pitt Review and the Government's Response. He outlined a number of key challenges and how the recommendations could be taken forward.

The following comments were made –

- Communities should be at the heart of addressing flood risks utilising Parish

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Councils at the local level to ensure communities are given adequate training and knowledge that will help to reduce flood risk

- Awareness of the dangers of building on flood plains property developers should be stressed and central government should ensure that when local authorities reject planning applications for flood plains these decisions are not reversed at the regional or national level.
- It was pointed out that the £5m grant scheme provided for local authorities to provide funding for households level protection measures in high risk areas was not sufficient
- Legislation for building farmers' reservoirs should be less restrictive
- Property owners should be made aware of their responsibilities to deal with flood waters.

Action – Members to forward any further comments on flooding to Vanessa Goodchild Bradley (vanessa.goodchildbradley@lga.gov.uk)

4. Groups Discussion

Members discussed the presentations and made some suggestions on the topics for sessions and workshops for the Rural Commission/Conference in September.

- It was pointed out that local authorities should encourage voluntary working in particular, in the current economic climate
- Members were concerned about the accessibility of heavy thru-lorries in rural areas.
- members were disappointed that Tim Crosier, Snr Policy Analyst, Cabinet Office and Hilary Mansfield, Special Adviser, Age Concern England were unable to attend to speak about *Older People and Social Exclusion* and asked that this issue should be considered at the Rural Commission/Conference in September.

The speakers and topics that had so far been confirmed for the Rural Commission/Conference in September included: Huw Irranca-Davies MP; Matthew Taylor MP; and Dame Suzi Leather of the Food Policy Council.

Confirmed workshops included Rural Road Safety and the Effects of Flooding on Planning.

Members suggested the following issues: Rural Transport (in terms of accessibility of lorries); Rural Broadband Access; How SMEs operate in rural economy; Older People and Rural Exclusion.

The Chair reported on the meeting he had with the Rural Minister, Huw Irranca Davies MP on 12th March and that this had been very positive. Officers would be seeking to arrange a further meeting in due course. Broadband access in rural areas being one of the subjects for discussion.

In general, it was felt that the Rural Commission meeting today was very useful and informative. The Chair thanked the officers for organising the meeting.

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Action: Officers to shape commission and conference programme to reflect members' suggestions.

5 Update Reports

The Rural Commission update reports were noted

6 Notes of the last meeting

The notes of the Rural Commission meeting held on 9 September 2008 were noted.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The next Rural Commission/Conference will be held on 8/9 September in Cambridge.

Present

Authority	Name	
Alnwick DC	Cllr John Taylor	Independent
Arun DC	Cllr Ricky Bower	Conservative
Ashford BC	Cllr Jessamy Blanford	Conservative
Bath & NE Somerset Council	Cllr Les Kew	Conservative
Boston BC	Cllr Richard Leggott	Independent
Bridgnorth DC	Cllr Milner Whiteman OBE	Independent
Brighton & Hove Council	Cllr Geoffrey Theobald	Conservative
Canterbury City	Cllr Rosemary Doyle	Conservative
Chelmsford BC	Cllr Tim Roper	Conservative
Cheshire CC	Cllr David Rowlands	Conservative
Cheshire FA	Tim Bevington	Officer
Chester City	Cllr Paul Roberts	Liberal Democrat
Colchester BC	Cllr Peter Chillingworth	Conservative
Cornwall CC	Cllr Terry Lello	Liberal Democrat
Dacorum BC	Cllr David Lloyd	Conservative
Dacorum BC	James Doe	Officer
Derbyshire Dales DC	Cllr Cate Hunt	Conservative
Dorset CC	Cllr John Peake MBE	Conservative
East Devon DC	Cllr Paul Diviani	Conservative
East Hertfordshire DC	Cllr Mike Carver	Conservative
East Northamptonshire DC	Cllr Rupert Reichhold	Conservative
East Staffordshire DC	Cllr Matthew Elias	Conservative
Erewash BC	Cllr Robert Parkinson	Conservative
Forest Heath DC	Nigel McCurdy	Officer
Gateshead MBC	Cllr John Hamilton	Labour
Hampshire CC	Cllr Ray Ellis	Conservative
Harborough DC	Cllr Rosita Page	Conservative
Hinckley & Bosworth BC	Cllr Bill Crooks	Liberal Democrat
Huntingdonshire DC	Cllr Keith Baker	Conservative
Hyndburn BC	Cllr Peter Britcliffe	Conservative
Kerrier DC	Cllr Pat Aston	Liberal Democrat
Kettering DC	Cllr Alison Wiley	Conservative
Kirklees MBC	Cllr Christine Smith	Conservative
Lancashire CC	Cllr Albert Atkinson	Conservative
Lancashire CC	Cllr Alan Whittaker	Labour
Lewes DC	Cllr David Rogers	Liberal Democrat
Litchfield DC	Cllr Neil Roberts	Conservative
Lincolnshire CC	Cllr Betty Harvey OBE	Conservative
Macclesfield BC	Cllr Jamie Macrae	Conservative
Maldon DC	Cllr Sheila Young	Conservative
Merseytravel	Cllr Alan Dean	Labour
Merseytravel	Cllr Tommy Fearn	Labour
Mid Bedfordshire DC	Cllr Nigel Aldis	Liberal Democrat

Mid Suffolk DC	Cllr Stuart Gemmill	Independent
Milton Keynes Council	Cllr Sam Potts	Liberal Democrat
New Forest DC	Cllr Edward Heron	Conservative
New Forest DC	Cllr Maureen Holding	Conservative
Norfolk CC	Cllr Sue Whitaker	Labour
Northamptonshire CC	Cllr Bob Seery	Conservative
North Cornwall DC	Cllr Neil Burden	Independent
North Kesteven DC	Cllr Marion Brighton OBE	Conservative
North Shropshire DC	Cllr David Minnery	Conservative
North Shropshire DC	Cllr Dewi Davies	Independent
North Yorkshire CC	Cllr Peter Sowray	Conservative
Nottinghamshire CC	Cllr Mick Storey	Labour
Preston City	Cllr Ken Hudson	Conservative
Richmondshire DC	Cllr Michael Heseltine	Conservative
Rotherham MBC	Cllr Ken Wyatt	Labour
Rotherham MBC	Cllr Frank Hodgkiss	Labour
Rushcliffe BC	Cllr Nigel Lawrence	Conservative
Ryedale DC	Cllr Natalie Warriner MBE	Independent
Salisbury DC	Cllr Mike Hewitt	Conservative
Sevenoaks DC	Cllr Alison Cook	Conservative
Sheffield City	Cllr Trevor Bagshaw	Liberal Democrat
Shepway DC	Cllr Alan Clifton-Holt	Conservative
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC	Cllr Josephine Jones	Conservative
South Bedfordshire DC	Cllr Alan Shadbolt	Conservative
South Kesteven DC	Cllr John Smith	Conservative
South Kesteven DC	Cllr Peter Martin-Mayhew	Conservative
South Lakeland DC	Cllr Stan Collins	Liberal Democrat
South Norfolk DC	Cllr Jeremy Savage	Conservative
South Somerset Council	Cllr Ric Pallister	Liberal Democrat
St Edmundsbury BC	Cllr Peter Stevens	Conservative
Suffolk CC	Cllr John Goodwin	Conservative
Swale BC	Cllr Andrew Bowles	Conservative
Teignbridge DC	Cllr Ray Frost	Independent
Tewkesbury BC	Cllr Robert Vines	Conservative
Tunbridge Wells BC	Cllr Barry Edwards	Conservative
Vale of White Horse DC	Cllr Terry Fraser	Liberal Democrat
Waverley BC	Cllr Bryn Morgan	Conservative
Wellingborough BC	Cllr Barry Graves	Conservative
West Berkshire Council	Cllr Royce Longton	Liberal Democrat
West Devon BC	Cllr Diana Moyse	Conservative
West Dorset DC	Cllr Mark Roberts	Conservative
Winchester City	Cllr Barry Lipscomb	Conservative
Worcestershire CC	Cllr Edward Sheldon MBE	Conservative