

## RSN Seminar: Town Centres, High Streets & Village Hubs

**Date:** 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021

**Subject:** Town Centres, High Streets & Village Hubs

**Chair:** [Graham Biggs MBE](#)<sup>1</sup>, Chief Executive, Rural Services Network

**Host:** Online Event via Zoom

### Speakers

**Speaker 1: Steve Dowling**, Public Affairs Manager, [Association of Convenience Stores](#)<sup>2</sup>

**Speaker 2: Christine Donnelly**, Non-Executive Director, [National Federation of Sub Postmasters](#)<sup>3</sup>

### Learning Outcomes

#### Examples of Good Practice/Reports/Information

- Stafford BC used its Assisted Restriction Grant (ARG) to write policies to support our rural businesses both existing and start-ups. and particularly those who missed out on mandatory Covid payments. Funding still available for [business recovery grants](#)<sup>4</sup>
- Support for community shops from the [Plunkett Foundation](#)<sup>5</sup>.
- [Community Access to Cash Pilots](#)<sup>6</sup>
- Article on [Post Offices to host banking hubs](#)<sup>7</sup>
- [ACS Rural Shop Report 2021](#)<sup>8</sup>
- [ACS Community Barometer research](#)<sup>9</sup>
- [Young Somerset](#)<sup>10</sup> – supporting young people in rural areas

### Key Learning Points

#### The Pandemic Legacy, Rural Shops & Changing Communities which will focus on rural element of latest shop report

- In the last year, Convenience Stores have achieved £16bn in sales and provided jobs for 126,500 people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rsonline.org.uk/page/our-team/graham-biggs/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.acs.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://nfsp.org.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.staffordbc.gov.uk/business-recovery-grants](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/business-recovery-grants)

<sup>5</sup> <https://plunkett.co.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://communityaccesstocashpilots.org/for-individuals/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://bmmagazine.co.uk/news/post-office-to-host-banking-hubs-to-offset-branch-closures/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.acs.org.uk/research/rural-shop-report-2021>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.acs.org.uk/research/community-barometer>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youngsomerset.org.uk/pages/category/bold-brave>

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- 79% of convenience stores in rural areas are independently owned
- 64% own their business, 13% work more than 70 hours per week and nearly a quarter take no holiday per year.
- 54% trade in isolation ie no other stores or businesses near by
- Since the pandemic, rural convenience stores now provide over 600,000 home deliveries a week and have adjusted their product ranges accordingly
- Levelling Up – need policy makers to invest in local not regional and promote 15-minute neighbourhoods
- Use Growth hubs to support local and circular economies
- ACS and RSN working with two big ATM operators re access to cash.

### **The challenges faced by a rural sub-postmaster**

- Challenges include operating costs, demanding hours, accountability, competition. Minimum wage goes up but little wiggle room to earn more money to pay for this.
- Valued by customers, work varied and belonging to a community
- Need fair remuneration rates for sub-postmasters and Banks to contribute to Outreach and banking service costs
- Outreach work is very demanding physically, time consuming travelling to diverse locations and out in adverse weather. It's a good solution but not perfect and vans often struggle with internet signal.
- Also have to consider if a member of staff is sick – which one do you do? Outreach or main Post Office – can't do both.
- Concern where the next generation of sub-postmasters will come. Most PO's are based in someone's house and very expensive to buy now and set up afresh.
- Work long hours to always be open and not let anyone down in community.
- Social value – keeping an eye on most vulnerable – informal and voluntary sup
- Local farming community a great support to Post Office – understand the value of buying local and keeping local

### **Any Other Key Outcomes from the Seminar**

**[RSN's Revitalising Rural Campaign](https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural)**<sup>11</sup> **Specific Policy Asks** of the Government is for fairer distribution of national resources to rural areas and more nuanced national policies. There are 14 Chapters in the campaign; and one looks at [Rural](#)

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural>

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[Economies](#)<sup>12</sup>, at [Rural Town Centres and High Streets](#)<sup>13</sup> and also [Challenges facing Young People in Rural Areas](#)<sup>14</sup>.

As new Government strategies are announced, RSN puts them through a “[Rural Lens Review](#)<sup>15</sup>” which adds depth and texture to the Policy Asks. A fresh crosscut of the Revitalising document being worked on will look in more depth at younger people. It will also look at the impact of various issues on younger people and develop case studies (personal experiences) rather than dry policy discussions. One of these reviews looks at [Government Place Based Funds](#)<sup>16</sup> and another at [Build Back Better High Streets](#)<sup>17</sup>.

[RSN report with Pragmatix Advisory](#)<sup>18</sup> on how there is bias in the metrics used towards northern, urban red-wall areas in the allocation criteria of the Levelling Up and other Funds.

[RSN report with Pragmatix Advisory](#)<sup>19</sup> on recognising and addressing the post-pandemic rural productivity challenge – Cultivating rural growth.

**Analysis and Commentary pieces** for Rural Services Network by Jessica Sellick, Researcher at Rose Regeneration: [From Survival to Revival: How can we Regenerate our High Streets?](#)<sup>20</sup>

**RSN Member Insights** produced by Dan Worth, Research & Performance Analyst, RSN. Please click on the link to access the [Economy Insights](#)<sup>21</sup>.

## Attendance and Apologies

### Attendance

| Full Name        | Organisation                        |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Vinia Abesamis   | Herefordshire Council               |
| Bethan Aldridge  | Rural Services Network              |
| Cllr Chris Allen | Burnham and Highbridge Town Council |
| James Armstrong  | Northumberland County Council       |
| Chris Ashman     | Isle of Wight Council               |

<sup>12</sup> <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-economies.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-town-centres.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2021/rural-younger-people/Kerry\\_Booth.pdf](https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2021/rural-younger-people/Kerry_Booth.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-view-on-governments-new-funds>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-lens-of-build-back-better-high-streets>

<sup>18</sup> <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/towards-the-uk-shared-prosperity-fund.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/cultivating-rural-growth.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/from-survival-to-revival-how-can-we-regenerate-our-high-streets>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/tag/economy-insights>

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| David Barnes               | Belper Town Council                           |
| Cllr Belinda Bawden        | Lyme Regis Town Council                       |
| Cllr Owen Bierley          | West Lindsey District Council                 |
| Graham Biggs               | Rural Services Network                        |
| Prof. Gary Bosworth        | Northumbria University                        |
| Steve Broome               | East Sussex County Council                    |
| Alison Brown               | Cambridgeshire ACRE                           |
| Lillian Burns              | National Association of Local Councils (NALC) |
| Cllr Julie Carr            | Lewes District Council                        |
| Esther Carter              | Sedgemoor District Council                    |
| Cllr Stephen Clarke        | West Northamptonshire Council                 |
| Josyanne Clarke            | North Somerset Council                        |
| Zoe Cornick                | Rugby Borough Council                         |
| Abi Culley                 | Warwickshire County Council                   |
| Angela Daly                | Irthlingborough Town Council                  |
| Andy Dean                  | Rural Services Network                        |
| Cllr James Deane           | Petersfield Town Council                      |
| Cllr Judith Derbyshire     | Eden District Council                         |
| Marina Di Salvatore        | West Lindsey District Council                 |
| Christine Donnelly         | National Federation of Sub Postmasters        |
| Steve Dowling              | Association of Convenience Stores             |
| Richard Dowson             | Raising Aspirations Empowering Change Ltd     |
| Andrea Durn                | Wotton Under Edge Town Council                |
| Robin Edge                 | Northumberland County Council                 |
| David Farnsworth           | East Riding of Yorkshire Council              |
| Cllr Lesley Farrow         | Petersfield Town Council                      |
| Louise Flavell             | Braintree District Council                    |
| Cllr Tina Foster           | Swanage Town Council                          |
| Cllr Jan Goffey            | Okehampton Town Council                       |
| Cllr Simon Gomes-Da Costa  | Downham Market Town Council                   |
| Dr Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins | Countryside and Community Research Institute  |
| Holly Goring               | Uckfield Town Council                         |
| Martin Gorringe            | Defra   |
| Alan Gray                  | North Kesteven District Council               |
| David Hall                 | Northumberland County Council                 |
| Adrian Hamilton            | Ryedale District Council                      |
| Jodie Hancock              | Biddulph Town Council                         |
| David Hardy                | Northumberland County Council                 |
| Cllr Michael Harris        | New Forest District Council                   |
| Antonia Harrison           | YMCA Lincolnshire                             |
| Cllr Lee Hatcher           | Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council       |

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| Michael Hewitt           | Cherwell District Council                         |
| Laura Higgins            | Somerset West and Taunton Council                 |
| Cllr Stephen Hillier     | West Sussex County & Mid Sussex District Councils |
| Christopher Hinchliff    | CPRE, the countryside charity                     |
| Cllr Tony Hiron          | Lutterworth Town Council                          |
| Ella Howman              | South Norfolk and Broadland Councils              |
| Dr Cllr Colin Hutchinson | Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council           |
| David Inman              | Rural Services Network                            |
| Gavin Iredale            | Reed in Partnership                               |
| Wendy Jackson            | Forest of Dean District Council                   |
| Nita Jarram              | South Hams & West Devon Borough Councils          |
| Claire Johnson           | Devon County Council                              |
| Karla Johnson            | Herefordshire Council                             |
| Liz Johnson-Idan         | Chard Town Council                                |
| Will Jones               | Dartmoor NPA                                      |
| Dr Andrew Jordan         | Wirksworth Town Council                           |
| Terry Jordan             | Wisbech Town Council                              |
| Amine Kabouchi           | West Oxfordshire District Council                 |
| Cllr Simon Leney         | Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council             |
| John Longden             | Pub is The Hub                                    |
| Rachel Lovett            | Northumberland County Council                     |
| Emily Lowe               | Herefordshire Council                             |
| Martyne Manning          | Stafford Borough Council                          |
| Toby Matthews            | Norfolk County Council                            |
| Emily McMonagle          | Lincolnshire County Council                       |
| Guy McQueen              | Lewes District & Eastbourne Borough Councils      |
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| Cllr Terence Moore       | Great Dunmow Town Council                         |
| Yvonne Morland           | Tandridge District Council                        |
| Caitlin Murray           | Cornwall Council                                  |
| Cllr Julie Najuk         | Gedling Borough Council                           |
| Janet Neale              | Warwickshire County Council                       |
| Lynne Nicholl            | Alzheimer's Society                               |
| Cllr Liz Parker          | Oxted Parish Council                              |
| Sue Petters              | Barnstaple Town Council                           |
| Amanda Phillips          | United Utilities                                  |
| Emma Phillips            | West Oxfordshire District Council                 |
| Jeff Pyrah               | Rother District Council                           |
| Nicola Radford           | Lincolnshire County Council                       |

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| Cllr Jeremy Savage   | South Norfolk District Council                           |
| Melanie Sealey       | Devon County Council                                     |
| Beth Searle          | Corsham Town Council                                     |
| Cllr Richard Sherras | Ribble Valley Borough Council                            |
| Clair Shields        | North York Moors NPA                                     |
| Emma Smith           | Shropshire Council                                       |
| Emma-Jane Snowden    | East Riding of Yorkshire Council                         |
| Katherine Stanley    | West Northamptonshire Council                            |
| Graham Swiss         | South Hams District Council & West Devon Borough Council |
| Cllr John Toye       | North Norfolk District Council                           |
| Cllr Alison Trenery  | Uttoxeter Town Council                                   |
| Carole Troake        | Harborough District Council                              |
| Steve Trotter        | Lechlade on Thames Town Council                          |
| Nadine Trout         | Rural Services Network                                   |
| Martin Tucker        | Wotton Under Edge Town Council                           |
| Anita Turner         | Somerset NHS Foundation Trust                            |
| Deborah Urch         | Westbury Town Council                                    |
| Alex Ward            | InvestSK/South Kesteven District Council                 |
| Catherine Weldon     | Cumbria County Council                                   |
| Cllr Amy Wheelton    | South Derbyshire District Council                        |
| Susan White          | Richmondshire District Council                           |
| Cllr Warren Whyte    | Buckingham Town Council                                  |
| Cllr Ryan Wills      | Bath and North East Somerset Council                     |
| Cllr Liz Withington  | North Norfolk District Council                           |
| Emma Wray            | Wealden District Council                                 |
| Cllr Julie Yelland   | West Devon Borough Council                               |

## Apologies

| Full Name           | Organisation                      |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Cllr Georgina Allen | Totnes Town Council               |
| Tony Allen          | Peacehaven Town Council           |
| Jennie Atherton     | Harrogate Borough Council         |
| Cllr Philip Atkins  | Staffordshire County Council      |
| Emma Baker          | Oundle Town Council               |
| Andy Bates          | South Hams and West Devon Council |
| Cllr Francis Beatty | Stafford Borough Council          |
| Miranda Beavers     | South Kesteven District Council   |
| Jane Berni          | YMCA Community Lincs              |

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| Penny Body                  | Devon Churches Rural Forum                                 |
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| Cllr Steve Bridger          | North Somerset Council                                     |
| Louisa Brinton              | Teignbridge District Council                               |
| Ruth Buckley Salmon         | National Federation of Subpostmasters                      |
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| Nigel Burch                 | South Holland District Council                             |
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| Matt Jones             | Suffolk County Council                   |
| Sarah Jones            | Shropshire Council                       |
| Katie Judge            | Solihull Council                         |
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| Cllr Phil King         | Harborough District Council              |
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| Ian Morrell            | No 65 High Street - Digital Health Hub   |
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| David Pooley           | St Austell Town Council                  |
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| Pam Posnett            | Leicestershire County Council            |
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| Julia Raven            | West Northamptonshire Council            |
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| Ian Kenneth Sherriff   | University of Plymouth                   |
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| Karen Wakefield       | Ollerton & Boughton Town Council             |
| Cllr Norman Webster   | Mid Sussex District Council                  |
| Cllr Jackie Westrop   | Downham Market Parish Council                |
| Clare Wilkins         | Peak District National Park                  |
| Claire Windridge      | Faversham Town Council                       |
| Cllr Mark Winnington  | Staffordshire County Council                 |
| Helen Wright          | East Riding of Yorkshire Council             |

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