

**RSN West Midlands Regional Seminar**  
**18<sup>th</sup> February 2019**  
**Stafford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford**  
**ST16 3AQ**

Thank you to Stafford Borough Council for kindly hosting this event

**Attendance**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Cllr Cecilia Motley	RSN Chair – Shropshire Council
Graham Biggs M.B.E.	RSN
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Cllr Joan Lea	North Warwickshire Borough Council
Cllr Bryan Cross M.B.E.	Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Les Caborn	Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Angela Loughran	Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Isabella Davies	Stafford Borough Council
Dr Malcolm Rigler FRSPH, Project Volunteer	Patients Association
Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Vinia Abesamis, Senior Policy & Funding Officer	Herefordshire Council
Cllr Mark Winnington	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Peter Whittaker	Bromsgrove District Council
Suzanne Shead, Head of Localities	Bromford
Mark Parkinson, Economic Development & Planning Policy Manager	Staffordshire County Council
Alastair Sheehan, Business Development Director	HBV Supported Living
Cllr Carolyn Trowbridge	Stafford BC & Staffordshire County Council
Gareth Wilson	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
Jeremy Lowe	The Farming Community Network (FCN)
Gordon Banks	The Farming Community Network (FCN)
Peter Hardy	The Farming Community Network (FCN)
Kerry Bolister, Assistant Director of Development	Housing Plus Group
Cllr Ann Edgeller	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Ray Sutherland	Stafford Borough Council
Steve Brain, Programmes & Performance Manager	Worcestershire County Council
Tony Price	Trent & Dove Housing
Gareth Jones	Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Rosemary Berry	Mid Devon District Council
Chris Egen, Senior Development Officer	Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Roger Evans	Shropshire Council
Ivan Annibal	Rose Regeneration
Dr Jessica Sellick	Rose Regeneration

## **1. Welcome**

The Chair, Cllr Roger Phillips, welcomed people to the second West Midlands Regional Meeting & Seminar.

He thanked Stafford Borough Council for their support in hosting the event.

## **2. Presentations**

The Seminar session received presentations from Professor Anne Green, University of Birmingham and Mark Barrow, Director of Place, Shropshire Council. The links to the presentations are attached.

### **(a) Anne Green – Rural Employment, business and skills**

Comments received after the presentation related to retirees into rural areas pushing up housing prices out of reach of local people; the need for good “step-down” affordable housing and the need for IT training/support for the more elderly population.

### **(b) Mark Barrow – Future Shropshire**

Comments received after the presentation related to the changing nature of County & Market Towns towards “days out”/leisure/eating out; potential use of heritage buildings as libraries/health hubs etc.; the need for Councils to ensure they had the right skills and decision-making powers to address commercialisation (by the Council) and addressing market failures and the need for “evidence” to support calls for action.

## **3. RSP Best Practice Session**

Presentation by Nigel Wilcock, Executive Director of the Institute of Economic Development on Economic Development in Rural UK

Comments received after the presentation related to Housing Targets set by Planning authorities “as soon as they were built - they were sold”; the need for flexible multi-tenure (including supported) housing needed; the role for modular housing

The Chair thanked all 3 presenters for their interesting presentations and different dimensions brought to the meeting’s attention

## **4. General Discussion**

**Graham Biggs** introduced the RSN call on government for a holistic Rural Strategy which was being launched as a national campaign on 1<sup>st</sup> March. Cllr Phillips urged people to sign up to the campaign and become ambassadors for the idea by promoting to others the need to support the campaign.

### **The following issues were raised and discussed**

#### **(a) Involvement of Parish Council**

NALC are members of RSP. We are being consulted along with NALC in terms of current spending decisions by Government. It is important for local organisations to

get on board to promote the role of place through parish/town councils at the local level. It is important to provide an integrated approach to developing strategies for rural places. RSN's job is to persuade national government that it needs a framework, breathing life into it in a rural area is important.

### **(b) Economic Development Connections**

Links between Rural Strategy and Shared Prosperity Fund and LEPs at the local level are important. BEIS are important players in this context. Graham – we will be engaging with all Government departments post the launch of the template rural strategy on March 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **(c) Process**

There is a plan for Stafford Borough, which has the development of the rural economy as a component. Where does this national strategy fit with this? Graham - It is a case of using this template as a document/approach to reflect upon in the production of individual corporate organisational documents.

### **(d) Nature of the Proposed Rural Strategy**

Could it be a little more prescriptive in setting norms for people to think about in the development of their strategies – perhaps for example in the context of neighbourhood plans and the tendency to Nimbyism. Graham there is an incipient process of Nimbyism in land allocation and local planning decisions, which sometimes causes a dislocation between policy and very specific rural locations.

### **(e) The Rural Milieu**

The economic downsides of rural economies make the attraction of key workers very challenging - a high- level strategy could be the basis on which national action could be taken to address these issues. Broadband and mobile connectivity, housing and skills are also examples in this context.

In terms of health, structural changes to the funding of health and social care have impacted negatively on the engagement of CCGs at a strategic level in wider strategic issues outside of health and care. This is a shame if we take the broad interpretation of public health as a key determinant of many aspects of rural life.

### **(f) Transport**

Recent discussions about rural transport have helped to surface the lack of connectivity in the way rural issues are thought about and addressed.

### **(g) Public Health**

We should not see public health as standing alone – in Shropshire it is being developed as part of a wider agenda linking it to other corporate priorities and by linking actions into the community and voluntary sector. Public Health resources are being diminished in terms of the stock of what is available for rural areas from a local government perspective.

### **(h) Planning**

Shropshire have a single (housing) plot development policy – focused on 80% of the market value – also important for the housing to be attached to a settlement. Planning has a major impact on the effectiveness of policies like this and its drive for urban concentration is hard to resist.

**(i) Economies**

In terms of rural economies – we can concentrate too much on challenges and not enough on positives, this is important.

**(j) Market Failure**

Ivan asked about the risk appetite for local authorities to address market failure – through local action. There was general interest in this as an agenda. Delegates identified a tradition of this in the early days of local government.

**(k) Business Support**

Often unglamorous investment and hands on support for small businesses is an important and valuable component of local authority economic development intervention.

**(l) Housing**

In managing housing risk – local community support is very important. Case studies of good examples are really valuable. Transferrable good practice is really useful.

**(m) Evidence**

Is a key element in terms of what can be achieved – many local authorities have no resources – we need to make the case for more investment in rural areas when properly measured – provides a good investment for the nation. Austerity is not coming to an end uniformly and this creates a justification for development in rural areas. Spending review and fairer funding review are important in this context. They are important for the redistribution of the business rates.

**(n) Rural Sovereign Wealth**

Ivan Annibal introduced the Rural Sovereign Wealth fund idea into the discussion as a concept for maximising the value of national resources for rural communities.

**5. Next Steps**

Cllr Roger Phillips identified the value of keeping the lobbying agenda moving forward in terms of the issues raised today – particularly in relation to the rural strategy argument.

**6. Meeting Apologies.**

The following were received: -

**Apologies**

Name	Organisation
Cllr Simon Geraghty	Worcestershire County Council

Cllr Karen Grinsell	Solihull MBC
Cllr Polly Andrews	Herefordshire Council
Jan Sobieraj, Chief Executive	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
John Longdon, Chief Executive	Pub is the Hub
Cllr Lee Chapman	Shropshire Council
Cllr Dave Wright	Telford & Wrekin Council
Paul Robinson, Chief Executive	Worcestershire County Council
Ursula Lidbetter, Chief Executive	Lincolnshire Co-op
Jane Johnson, Local Director – North Midlands	Health Education England
Melissa Green, General Secretary	NFWI
Cllr Tony Jefferson	Stratford – on – Avon District Council
Kate Pym, Managing Director	Pym's Consultancy
Cllr David Harlow	Herefordshire Council
Amy Beeton	Health Education England
Caroline Shaw, Chief Executive	King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust
Cllr Malcolm Leeding	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
Martin Rehorn, Director of Finance	Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service
Robert Gatensbury, Economic Development Manager	Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Andrea Morgan	Malvern Hills District Council
Rita Lawson BA(Hons); MIED, Chief Executive	Tees Valley Rural Action
Cllr Peter Nutting	Shropshire Council
Cllr Arnold England	Telford & Wrekin Council
James Bullion, Executive Director	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Brian Cox	South Staffordshire Council
Martyne Manning, Economic Development Officer	Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Frances Beatty MBE	Stafford Borough Council

Dr Tom Lawrence	TRL Insight
Cllr Penny-Anne O'Donnell	Stratford-on-Avon District Council