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## Minutes Rural Economy Sub-Group

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Venue: [The LGA](#), 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ  
Date: Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2020  
Time: 11.00 am – 12.30 pm

[Please follow this link for the map of the venue.](#)

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### 1. Attendance & Apologies

#### Attendance

Cllr Cecilia Motley	RSN & Shropshire Council
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Charles Trotman	Country Land and Business Association
Ian Cass	Forum of Private Business
Chris Stanton	Guildford Borough Council
Cllr Chris Mapey	East Suffolk Council
Cllr Gerard Brewster	Mid Suffolk District Council
Cllr Harry St John	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Kevin Dukes	Bassetlaw District Council
Cllr Malcolm Leeding	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
Cllr Michael Rickman	Harborough District Council
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Peter Schwier	Braintree District Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Stephen Clarke	South Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Sue Tucker	Scarborough Borough Council
Cllr Suzie Morley	Mid Suffolk District Council
Cllr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Virginia Taylor	Eden District Council
David Rodda	Cornwall Council

**Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers**

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Ellie Jason	The Prince's Countryside Fund
Gary Taylor	South Holland District Council
Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Julia Raven	South Northamptonshire Council
Karl Bassett	Melton Borough Council
Ken Christy	Northamptonshire ACRE
Mandie Berry	North Somerset Council
Mandy Ramm	Nottinghamshire County Council
Marina Di Salvatore	West Lindsey District Council
Mark Winnington	Staffordshire County Council
Melanie Sealey	Devon County Council
Michael Hewitt	Cherwell District Council
Neil Irving	North Yorkshire County Council
Nilesh Joshi	National Federation of Subpostmasters
Shalon Perkins	North Lincolnshire Council
Toby Matthews	Norfolk County Council
Vinia Abesamis	Herefordshire Council

### **Apologies**

Adrian Welsh	Mid Devon District Council
Alan Gray	North Kesteven District Council
Alice Mason	Wychavon District Council
Christine Marshall	Breckland Council
Claire Saunders	The Prince's Countryside Fund
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew	Somerset and West Taunton Council
Cllr Daniel Cribbin	Daventry District Council
Cllr David Ireton	North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
Cllr James MacCleary	Lewes District Council
Cllr Ken Pollock	Worcestershire County Council
Cllr Louise Richardson	Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Malcolm Brown	Cornwall Council
Cllr Margaret Squires	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Oliver Hemsley	Rutland County Council
Cllr Richard Sherras	Ribble Valley Borough Council

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Cllr Richard Wright	North Kesteven District Council
Cllr Rupert Reichold	East Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Sarah Butikofer	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Stephen Arnold	Ryedale District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Tim Oliver	Surrey County Council
Cllr Zoe Nicholson	Lewes District Council
Darren Henley	Arts Council England
Dominie Dunbrook	North Devon Council
Emily Kent	Cornwall Council
Gary Powell	Teignbridge District Council
Giles Hughes	West Oxfordshire District Council
Helen Harris	Leicestershire County Council
Ian Hunter	Creative Rural Industries Consortium
James Tenant	East Northamptonshire Council
Jenny Poole	Cotswold District Council/West Oxfordshire District Council
John Birtwistle	UK Bus - First Group
Julian German	Cornwall Council
Liz Small	North Yorkshire County Council
Lorraine Gore	King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
Mark Carroll	Essex County Council
Mark Pople	Daventry District Council
Melanie Burgoyne	Chichester District Council
Paul Henry	Suffolk County Council
Peter Sharp	Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Council
Revd Richard Kirlew	Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy
Sally Nelson	North Devon Council
Sarah McMillan	Northumberland County Council
Sean McGrath	Lancashire County Council
Stacey Burlet	Ryedale District Council
Tony Galloway	Ryedale District Council
Tony Jefferson	Stratford District Council
Toyubur Rahman	Chichester District Council
Trevor Beattie	South Downs National Park

- 2. Notes from the previous Rural Economy Sub-Group meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 were agreed as a correct record. (Attachment 1)**
- 3. "It's Time for a Rural Strategy" – progressing the campaign. (Attachment 2)**

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During the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 RSN Executive meeting the future of “It’s Time for a Rural Strategy” campaign was discussed. The decisions of the Executive are set out in the attachment.

The House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy supported the Call for a Rural Strategy. They noted the need for socio-economic functions to be integral to that and the desired outcomes. But Theresa May’s Government decided the position should be tackled by rural proofing not by a Government Strategy.

The current Minister Theresa Villiers has been approached but exiting position only acknowledged so far. Clearly, we need for the pressure on Government to continue. The All-Party Parliamentary Group will be recommended to have this item on their programme. The Regional Roadshows will continue. Next dates for these events are outlined below:

- 9<sup>th</sup> of March – Rural Strategy Roadshow & South East Regional Seminar – Chichester District Council;
- 19<sup>th</sup> of March – Rural Strategy Roadshow, Warwick – Warwick Business School, Warwick University;
- 23<sup>rd</sup> of March – South West Regional Seminar – East Devon District Council.

We need to look at new issues, like Climate Change, but also keep on top of Rural Service issues and look at the barriers around rural. Need to prove that rural can flourish if those barriers are removed. We need to continue work on Fair Funding, Devolution and Rural Housing issues as well.

RSN accept they must work with others and the Chair emphasised the need to ensure complementary co-ordination with similar campaigns led by other groups.

#### **4. Local Industrial Strategies.**

##### **4.1. Presentation by Charles Trotman, CLA Senior Economic Adviser, RDPE External Working Group. “How LEPs can maximise their contribution to UK Productivity by including rural business”. (Attachment 3)**

Charles totally agreed with Graham about the need for joint thinking. The CLA had direct links into Government. A common uniform message from all groups was important. The Industrial Strategy was still a very live document in his view, but he agreed the Grand Challenges therein did not fit well in the rural context. The rural productivity level was 8% less than urban. There was

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a need for policy measures for LEPs to take on the policies of rural proofing if that position was to change.

**Key issues:**

- a. Infrastructure
  - A mobile network with shared masts.
  - Approaches need to be developed to tackle lack of digital skills in the workplace. Support needs to be developed for rural firms in recruitment, development and retention of skilled staff. While most of the country is covered by digital broadband but take up as low as 50-55%. Digital skills are fundamental for opportunities to be taken up in the first place.
- b. Need for a common language about what rural entails and what rural opportunities are. LEPs need to be made to take up the rural challenge. Brexit issues remain. There is a need for regulatory alignment with the European Union and for appropriate labour levels. If migrant labour is to be lost there is a need in upskilling of local labour.
- c. Policy vacuum – in a lot of the 38 LEPs between the LEPs itself and the rural economy. Leicestershire have demonstrated how it is might be done. It is for other LEPs to show similar initiatives. EU rural funding will in CLA's view, be rolled over until 2024. They want to see the same percentage of these funds being ringfenced.
- d. They are calling for Treasury to give rural their due percentage. Of the present £100 million pot. This would give £16 million of matching funds.
- e. Further Education colleges should be charged with providing the right courses to cover the right skills to replace the migrant labour leaving the country.
- f. Openreach are expanding their rural programme as they must make a commitment to rural areas for a fibre network in accordance with government policy.
- g. However, the way we leave will have to be negotiated to ensure this happens. This will be a challenge. A proper negotiation procedure has to be established.
- h. Graham Biggs outlined the problems that lack of statistical data down to a local level to allow the LEPs to fully consider the rural position.
- i. CLA have some of these down to District Council level but the information has been provided by DEFRA on a confidential base.
- j. It was felt that some LEPs might be making some positive noises, but this was not necessarily being taken forward in delivery terms – there was a need for LEPs to be required to rural proof their strategies and funding decisions.

**4.2. Presentation by Ian Cass, Managing Director, Forum of Private Business “The Threat to Rural Pubs”. (Attachment 3 A)**

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- a. 3,000 members in the UK.
- b. Government are poor with small business and with rural businesses. This needs to improve if full opportunities are to be grasped.
- c. The brewing structure now seen as an opportunity for non-brewers. They purchase pubs and look for unrealistic rents and also look for the pub to close so they can achieve housing land values.
- d. Pubs are not necessarily closing for lack of customers but because of the agendas of the landowners.
- e. What can be done: link and work with CAMRA; trying to get literature to tenants and to rural communities.

Document produced by RSN, CAMRA & Forum of Private Business will be going to Parliament. Looking for lightening of planning laws.

6 big firms now own most of the country's 21,000 pubs. It is a real problem as a pub is very much at the heart of rural communities across England.

Meeting endorsed the campaign by Forum of Private Business and thanked Ian Cass for his presentation.

**4.3. Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership Local Industrial Strategy.** (Attachment 4)

The document supplied by Helen Harris (Economic Growth Manager at Leicestershire County Council) was noted and supported.

**4.4. RSN Chief Executive Graham Biggs to update members on the proposed work between the RSN and the Institute for Economic Development in "Rural Proofing" Local Industrial Strategies.**

RSN working with IED to establish a matrix of data. The RSN's initial assessment was that a lot of data was not available at a local enough level. Graham didn't necessarily accept that District level was low enough.

The RSN were happy to work with CLA and DEFRA officers in unearthing all the appropriate data but remained concerned that there were currently significant data omissions.

Economic Development Officers would be consulted in due course.

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**5. “Land of Opportunity. England’s Rural Periphery”. (Attachment 5)**

RSN welcomed the report from NLGN in collaboration with Cornwall Council and its call for a Rural Commission. RSN are happy to sign up to 90% of it but do have outstanding queries outlined below:

- a. Exclusion of counties based on a town over 123,000 could be slightly misleading.
- b. Discussion was necessary as there was a need to bring lobbying activity together as far as possible to prevent separate reports being used as an excuse by government to not progress any overall rural strategy.
- c. Be good to have discussions.
- d. Individual member authorities would obviously take whatever lead they felt desirable but there was a need for national campaigns to dovetail as far as possible.
- e. AOB  
Agriculture Bill  
RSN would circulate the LGA’s paper when it became available.  
Concerns were expressed about some of the long-term implications to the wider economy.  
It was felt the LEPs should be inputting into this more than they were.

**6. Any other business.**

The next meeting date of this group will be Monday 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2020.

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