



## **Most Frequently Asked Questions about Rural Services Network and the Rural/Market Towns Group**

### **What is our mission statement? In other words, why are we here and why we are doing this?**

To put it simply, Rural Services Network (or RSN) seeks to improve the lives of people living in rural areas. The Defra definition of rural dwellers includes those living in market towns (below a population of 30,000) and other centres serving rural areas. We feel in England rural people get a poorer deal than other parts of the country due to more restrictive government funding, grants and services as well as a bigger emphasis being put on urban-centric areas. We at RSN seek to represent the rural case and amplify the rural voice on behalf of all our groupings to argue fairer funding for rural areas.

### **Is Rural Services Network a quango?**

Definitely not! RSN is an independent and completely non-political organisation that has been operating for more than 18 years. We get no government funding whatsoever nor do we want any because government funding can restrict the ability to argue a case that government may not wish to encourage. RSN is a voluntary organisation operating from an earned subscription pot. We are a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association, and because we handle money, we are a legal entity – a not for profit company limited by guarantee.

### **Why should Town Councils join the Rural/Market Towns Group?**

RSN is the national champion for rural services and aims to provide a strong voice for rural communities. We want to focus on giving the town councils a voice in the national debate and enable them to have their voice heard. By coming together the rural towns will have a stronger voice on issues that matter to them.

### **Why is this initiative important for every rural resident?**

Rural areas and their intricate network of rural communities are capable of being a much more important part of the national economy and need to be appropriately recognised and supported in government thinking and actions. We want to help our rural communities to reach their potential, and we think that by working together, it provides all those in rural areas with a collective voice to raise issues.



### **What are the benefits of membership?**

Services provided to the group will include:

- Development of some good practice and learning material related to the key policy areas and delivery challenges or opportunities for rural/market towns;
- Receiving the Rural Bulletin, a weekly newsletter provided by the Rural Services Network highlighting rural news, issues affecting rural communities, and highlighting the work of the Rural Services Network;
- Provision of a dedicated newsletter highlighting relevant latest policy developments, showcasing interesting member practice and flagging relevant initiatives or funding opportunities;
- Occasional online surveys of the members of rural/market towns, to gather comparative information about topics of interest to this grouping;
- Engagement in Rural Strategy campaign to ensure feedback from Market Town Group is included within consultation.

### **How will this group work within the RSN?**

The Rural Services Network in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, health organisations and other organisations providing services in rural areas has already established several groups highlighting rural matters. We felt the time was right to establish a Rural/Market Towns Group to support these crucial rural areas. We believe that by working together on key rural issues with rural market towns and other rural organisations and service providers we can amplify the rural voice and persuade the Government to address rural concerns.

### **What is RSN intending to do?**

We seek to argue the rural and the market town case in order to persuade Government to provide special focus to rural areas and develop a cross governmental, properly funded Rural Strategy, which could serve as a national framework as far as is practicable with local delivery. We also want to establish a best practice role for the group allowing rural based information to be disseminated and shared between members.

We are seeking to establish a group to form a collective voice for Rural/Market Towns. We will hold a few meetings a year, but we appreciate that attending meetings can be costly and time consuming for all members. Hence why we are planning to start by collecting information from each council via online surveys to gain member views. This will allow us to establish consensus rural market town viewpoints with input from all our members whether they attend meetings or not. Going forward we would aim to work with all members to develop this group further, so that every council feels represented.



### **Will there be additional cost above the small subscription?**

No additional income other than the subscription will be requested.

### **Why have we contacted your parish/town council?**

Rural areas are all very different as England is a particularly diverse country. We have selected 200 places with seemingly varying rural characteristics to initially invite, with a view to ensuring input can be fairly claimed to be cross national. We have largely so far generally avoided using neighbouring parishes/towns for that reason. However, having established such an initial operating platform we do plan to incrementally grow the grouping out from there and all rural parishes/towns will in time be involved.

### **Towns are often members of organisations like NALC and Market Operation Associations. Is there an overlap with other organisations?**

No, our role is very different. NALC deal with Local Council representation and Market Operation Associations deal with the operation of Markets. Their work is across rural and urban authorities. We work solely on rural issues – rural representation and the spread of rural best practice.

### **Has there been a Market Towns initiative before?**

Yes, there has, and some good work was done but it was for a time limited period. It was grant and project based, and it included all English Towns. The essential difference is that this initiative is subscription based from the start to seek continuity and is solely rurally based. It seeks to find commonality of argument across rural town and their rural hinterland to mutual advantage.

Already recruitment for this group has started strongly. Many towns are enthusiastic about establishing this initiative as they believe that forming such a group is long overdue. We are aware that a collective grouping clearly cannot carry out local projects, but it can enhance the importance of these needs.