



**RDPE Network and UK National Rural Network
RDPE Programme Monitoring Committee**

25th November 2008, Nobel House, London

1. Introduction

This paper provides an update on the current progress around the development of both the UK National Rural Network (UK NRN) and the RDPE Network. The paper also highlights key challenges and priorities in the development of the RDPE Network and provides a number of areas for discussion.

2. UK National Rural Network

2.1 Purpose – What difference will the UK NRN make?

In accordance with the Rural Development Regulation (RDR), the UK has to establish a National Rural Network. The UK NRN will link the four Networks being developed for the Rural Development Programmes for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and will provide the interface with the European Commission and the European Rural Development Network. The purpose of the UK NRN is to:

‘Support the implementation and evaluation of UK rural development programmes through the exchange of expertise and good practice on the rural development policy design, management and implementation between a comprehensive range of stakeholders within the four Rural Development Programme Networks of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the European Rural Development Network.’

2.2 Progress to Date

Operationally, the development of the UK NRN is on track, in line with the current needs of England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland and in order to meet the EC deadline. Current progress to date includes:

- The establishment of the Network Unit within the CRC;
- The development of a Steering Group, which incorporates the four Managing Authorities and four Network units;
- A temporary website via the CRCs website;
- Planning the development of the UK NRN and its draft Action Plan;
- Engagement with a range of stakeholders at European and national levels.
- Participation in the European Rural Development Network and its Leader sub-committee
- Participation in the European Evaluation Network.

3. RDPE Network

3.1 Purpose – What difference will the RDPE Network make?

In line with the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) and RDPE Programme Document, the purpose of the RDPE Network is to:

‘Support the implementation and evaluation of the RDPE through the successful exchange of experience and good practice on RDPE policy design, programme management and implementation, across the four axes and between a comprehensive range of stakeholders at local, regional, national and European levels’.

3.2 Underpinning Principles in the Establishment and Operation of the RDPE Network

The following principles underpin the establishment, development and operation of the RDPE Network and correspond to the RDR:

- Bridge approaches between bottom-up implementation and top-down policy;
- Build the legitimacy of the Network and develop a Network that is relevant to stakeholders and fit for purpose, thus stakeholders must have the opportunity to inform both the structure and prioritisation of activities;
- Build on existing structures, to avoid duplication and maximise synergies, added value and the benefits of existing knowledge, infrastructure and experience;
- Be as close to local beneficiaries as possible;
- Work with the RDPE delivery bodies to embed integrated, sustainable development and link the environmental, economic and social objectives and activities under the Programme;
- Members will continually be encouraged and supported to feedback on the development and activities of the Network and to actively participate in its future evolution.

3.3 RDPE Network Action Plan - Progress to Date

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has been asked by Defra, as the RDPE’s Managing Authority, to act as the Network Unit, to facilitate and co-ordinate the structures necessary for the establishment, development and operation of the RDPE Network.

The CRC has undertaken to meet the requirements of the RDR, to establish the Network by the end of 2008. Significant progress has been made and importantly, the approach taken has received universal support from the delivery bodies and key stakeholders with whom the Network has engaged with to date. Annex 1 sets out the RDPE Network Action Plan: Activity Schedule. In summary, key progress against the action plan includes:

- i. **The establishment of the Network Unit within the CRC** – This Unit is co-ordinating the establishment, development and operation of the Network, to ensure that the structures (e.g. staffing, secretariat function, contract management, business and finance planning etc.) are in place to run the Network, as required by the RDR. This Unit is also establishing links with the wider work of the CRC to ensure that the Network utilises the CRCs ongoing activities to identify and promote good practice.
- ii. **Strategic planning of Network establishment and development** — This activity has set out the approach that will be taken to developing the Network between now and 2013, in order to engage key stakeholders and manage their expectations and to ensure that all activity and resource expenditure is working towards delivering the main Network outcome by 2013, including clear monitoring and evaluation.

As part of this planning, in order to build a body of RDPE knowledge relevant to networking and good practice and initial stakeholder engagement, the Network is delivering a 'market research and stakeholder engagement' project that:

- a) Scopes out the current RDPE policy priorities, programme management, implementation arrangements and relevant existing networking activity within each of the eight English regions and their implications for informing the structure and activities of the Network;
- b) Through contacting approximately 1000 stakeholders, develops the Unit's understanding of their needs and expectations of the RDPE Network and their implications for informing the structure and activities of the Network. This contact is being delivered via interviews, an e-survey and focus groups.

This project has received a positive engagement by stakeholders. The project is due to report in January 2009, the findings of which will be universally available.

- iii. **The development of the Network Action Plan (Year 1)** See Annex 1– The Action Plan includes two main groupings of activities to animate the Network: i) those needed to run the Network structure, i.e. the activities of the Network Unit and; ii) the operational activities, i.e. networking between stakeholders, projects, website etc. The thematic/sectoral/territorial activity of the Action Plan will be informed by the Network market-research and stakeholder engagement project. The Action Plan will be refreshed annually based on stakeholder needs.
- iv. **The development and delivery of a draft RDPE Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Communications Plan 2008-2013** – Given that much of the Network activity is based on communication clear prioritisation is essential. To date the Network has already made productive links and held discussions with each of the delivery bodies (at

regional and national levels), a number of networks at European level, both within Member States and on a pan-European basis, as well as with a significant number of organisations at national and sub-national levels, see Annex 2. Links will be made between this communications planning and that of the Defra RDPE Team. The Communications Plan will be refreshed annually.

- v. **Regular contribution to the development of the UK National Rural Network (UK NRN)** – Currently, formal contribution from the RDPE Network to the UK NRN takes place on a monthly basis, informal sharing of approaches and progress takes place more frequently to ensure that the four countries in the UK are developing to support one another.

4. **Current Challenges**

Establishing the Network in England is not as simple a process as in many other Member States, due to the plethora of existing rural development networking and the complexity of programme delivery arrangements. Indeed, there are a number of key challenges that continue to need to be managed as the Network is developed. In summary these include:

- Many networks related to rural development and indeed specific foci within the axes, currently operate within England. Consequently, the RDPE Network is being established to ensure that it does not duplicate existing activities and functions but is identifying synergies and opportunities for working with and through existing networks and stakeholders, thus ensuring maximum value added for the resources available and RDPE stakeholders;
- Lack of information to understand what networking activity relevant to RDPE (i.e. good practice, sharing of information and expertise, training etc.) is currently taking place within England or to understand what actual stakeholder needs are. This situation is being addressed through the Network market research and stakeholder engagement project.
- Given the variation in regional circumstances, the Network will need to be flexible to the different regional RDPE needs, i.e. how it links to, works with and is used by the 8 regions and sub-regional stakeholders.

5. **Priorities for Action**

In addition to the ongoing development and delivery activity outlined in section 3.3 above, two further activities have been prioritised:

- i. **The establishment of infrastructure to support the collation, storage, analysis, evaluation, dissemination and application of Network information** – This is temporarily being delivered via the CRC website and is currently being updated to provide online access to all available RDPE Network information. The ongoing development of an independent website will be delivered based on clear stakeholder needs as identified

through the market research and stakeholder engagement project. Annex 3 provides a summary of what will be on the RDPE Network website by December 2008.

- ii. **The establishment of a Network Advisory Group** – This will equip the Network with a mechanism that provides independent, transparent and objective challenge and advice. The proposed draft membership list will be finalised by the market research and stakeholder engagement project and the first meeting will take place in January/February 2009.

6. Discussion

The Network would welcome your general views and reflections on the contents of this paper and the development of the RDPE Network itself. However, more specifically, the Network is keen to explore with the PMC:

- Your views on the relationship between the PMC and the Network?
- How the RDPE Network could be of most use to the PMC in fulfilling your Committee responsibilities?
- What types of organisations should be represented on the RDPE Network Advisory Group?
- Your views on the priority areas for action in 2009?

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Annex 1: RDPE Network Action Plan (Draft): Activity Schedule – Phase 1 (May 2008 to March 2009)

For the operational period May 2008 to March 2009, the Action Plan identifies seven key work areas (outputs) and related activities as identified in the schedule below. The seven key work areas are outlined below:

- **Output 1 - Network Unit established within the CRC to manage the establishment, development and operation of the RDPE Network.**
- **Output 2 - Market-led overarching RDPE Network Strategy 2008-13, informed by key stakeholders developed, agreed with Defra and the Advisory Group.**
- **Output 3 - The RDPE Network Advisory Group established and operationalised.**
- **Output 4 - Market-led RDPE Network Action Plan developed, informed by key stakeholders and agreed with Defra and the Advisory Group. Identified Year 1 activity implemented.**
- **Output 5 - Overarching RDPE Network Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Communications Plan 2008-2013 and Year 1 Communications Plan developed. Identified Year 1 activity implemented.**
- **Output 6 - Contribute to the establishment and development of the UK National Rural Network.**
- **Output 7 - Infrastructure to support the collation, storage, analysis, evaluation, dissemination and application of Network information established.**

The activity schedule to deliver the seven key work areas for the RDPE Network is outlined below. Progress against this schedule is reported on quarterly.

No.	Activity Description	Timescale	Indicators of Achievement
Output 1 - Network Unit established within the CRC to manage the establishment, development and operation of the RDPE Network.			
1.1	Complete Defra PID and secure agreement between CRC and Defra.	By 12/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PID formally agreed between Defra RDPE Team and CRC Director (senior responsible officer)
1.2	Complete business planning processes, including annual and quarterly development and reporting processes.	By 07/08 + Ongoing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear outcome and outputs agreed. • Logical Framework created – includes outcome, outputs, activities, monitoring, assumptions and risks. • Monthly traffic-lights report completed. • 2009-10 business planning process initiated. • Information paper for Programme Board completed. • Discussion paper for PMC completed. • Monthly CRC/Defra delivery liaison meetings completed. • RDPE Network filing system established.
1.3	Complete financial management processes, including annual and quarterly development and reporting processes.	By 07/08 + Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RDPE Network finance systems established (e.g. budget coding, procurement) • Mid-year budget revision completed. • Monthly traffic-lights report completed.
1.4	Secure agreement between CRC and Defra on RDPE Network financial monitoring process.	By 09/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical financial monitoring and reporting process agreed between Gillian Lloyd Williams and Steve Bickers. • Contract letters agreed and exchanged between CRC and Defra.
1.5	<p>Develop CRC internal mechanisms to integrate the work of the CRC into the Network and vice versa, in order to maximise the added value of the CRC acting as the host organisation. Deliver this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner seminar and update papers; • Policy forum; 	By 03/09 + On going.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission Management Board paper presented and agreed. • Commissioner seminar completed. • Discussions completed with individual Commissioners. • Intranet page created and updated bi-monthly.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff meeting updates and discussion; • Intranet information; • Programme Managers Group updates and discussion; • Whitehall Team briefings • Commission Management Board updates and discussion; • Discussions with individual Programme Mangers to identify specific issues/knowledge/good practice to feed into the Network. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates to staff provided bi-monthly via 'What's New'. • Whitehall Team briefed about Network. • Meetings held with CRC policy teams to identify cross-working opportunities and feed into the network.
1.6	Complete Network Annual Report	By 03/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RDPE Network Annual Report published
1.7	Staff recruitment, plus direct and matrix management of staff time	By 03/09 + On going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff recruitment for H post underway. • Staff resource secured and managed from Administration Team and Communication Team.
Output 2 - Market-led overarching RDPE Network Strategy 2008-13, informed by key stakeholders developed, agreed with Defra and the Advisory Group.			
2.1	Complete, via external contract, rapid market research and engagement project, in order to inform the development of the Network structure and identification and prioritisation of network activities.	By 01/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact let. • Contract delivery of: i) a national picture of RDPE policy/management and implementation across the 8 regions; ii) a network map identifying opportunities for joint working and areas to avoid duplication; iii) engagement with approx. 800 stakeholders to better understand their needs and expectations of the RDPE Network. • Contract delivery of an extensive stakeholder database. • This project also represents the first major flow of information between the Network and stakeholders, including providing information about the Network to stakeholders, as well as listening and receiving information from stakeholders.
2.2	Develop and implement communications activity for the market-research and engagement exercise, to be included within the	By 01/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory leaflet produced and leaflet/wording circulated with all project stakeholder communication

	Year 1 Communications Activity Planner (see 5.3).		<p>to ensure clear and consistent messages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard copies of leaflet also handed out to focus group attendees. • Updates on project progress due to be provided on CRC intranet, What's New, RDPE Website and selected external rural development network websites.
2.3	Make the results of the market research and engagement project publicly available via the Network website. All participants in the exercise receive thanks and feedback on results.	By 01/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each stakeholder participants will receive a thank you + a link to the summary and full findings of the project. • Updates on the project findings will be provided on CRC intranet, What's New, RDPE Website and selected external rural development network websites.
2.4	Develop market-led RDPE Network Strategy 2008-13, secure agreement with Defra and Advisory Group	By 01/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy agreed with Defra and Advisory Group and published.
2.5	Relationship between RDPE Network and UK NRN formalised and agreed with Defra.	By 09/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship agreed between UK NRN and RDPE Network, via confirmation of governance arrangements between Defra and CRC.
Output 3 - The RDPE Network Advisory Group established and operational.			
3.1	Identify potential members of the Advisory Group from the market-research and engagement exercise. Assess potential gaps in representation of stakeholders on the group and identify further potential members	By end 11/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of potential members drafted. • Exploration of potential members included in market research and stakeholder engagement project, in order to inform final list for invitations. • Seek feedback from PMC on membership. • Agree final Advisory Group membership list.
3.2	Provide secretariat support for the Advisory Group - Set-up, co-ordinate and follow up, via electronic exchange, the first Advisory Group meeting	By 02/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm final invitation list + send the invitations out. • Draft agenda and fieldwork trip • Draft the terms of reference • Draft first agenda • Finalise papers.

Output 4 - Market-led RDPE Network Year 1 Action Plan developed, informed by key stakeholders and agreed with Defra and the Advisory Group. Identified Year 1 activity implemented.			
4.1	Draft of Year 1 Action Plan developed and agreed with Defra and Year 1 activities implemented.	By 11/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft for Defra comment by the end of November 08. • Activities within this activity schedule implemented.
4.2	Year 1 Action Plan updated to take account for the results from the market-research and engagement exercise and agreed with Defra and Advisory Group.	By 02/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope out the potential thematic/sectoral/territorial areas¹ to be prioritised for Network activity in Year 2. • Scope out potential delivery mechanisms and tools for the delivery of the potential thematic/sectoral/territorial Network activity¹. • Year 1 Action Plan updated and information prioritised to inform Year 2 Action Plan. • Identified prioritised themes and good practice to focus on in 2009 – from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 4 axes ➤ policy design, programme management and programme implementation ➤ European, national and sub-national levels (trans-national and inter-territorial).
4.3	LAG event for 64 LAGs + Defra + RDAs + relevant support organisations.	By 03/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together informal steering group to develop event agenda (LAG/Carnegie/RDA/ACRE). • Event planned, co-ordinated and delivered. • Event delivered with positive feedback. • Event delivered to enable all LAGs an opportunity to meet and begin formal networking.

¹ I.e. Potentially the Network could focus on any aspect of the 4 axes and any aspect of policy design, programme management and programme implementation, at various levels from national to local, given the regionalisation of implementation. Thus, to utilise limited resources effectively, the RDPE Network stakeholders must be involved in the prioritisation of these potential thematic/sectoral/territorial areas and scoping must be completed to understand what activity is already taking place (to avoid duplication), where the gaps are and where there are synergies and opportunities for joint working,

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications plan for event delivered.
Output 5 - Overarching Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Communications Plan 2008-2013 and Year 1 Plan for the RDPE Network developed and implemented.			
5.1	Complete stakeholder mapping workshop, utilising Engage principles as set out by the Government Communication Network.	By 10/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder mapping exercise completed. • Mapping exercise informed the market-research and stakeholder engagement project and the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Communications Plan.
5.2	Transfer stakeholder mapping analysis into contacts database, to be utilised for communications activities and market-research and engagement exercise.	By 01/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder mapping transferred onto the database. However, the market research and stakeholder engagement project has added to the stakeholder contacts and so a final database will be created at the end of the project, to combine the existing stakeholder database with the project database.
5.3	Develop Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Communications Plan 2008/13 and year 1 activity planner, including initial implementation.	By 12/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy published • Discussions held with the following stakeholders and initial relationships developed: See Annex 2. • Market research and stakeholder engagement project underway as the first communication and flow of information between the Network and stakeholders. • Basic website created within CRC website. • RDPE Network e-mail account operational. • Full contact details, website links and e-mail address included in every external communication (i.e. briefings, discussion papers, e-mails, leaflets etc). • 2 RDPE Network promotional stands. • RDPE Network logo, user guidelines and power point template produced. • 'Introduction to the RDPE Network' leaflet produced and circulated. • 2 discussions papers produced (May 08 and Sept. 08) that have been used to stimulate discussion with

			<p>stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 power point presentations have been produced to stimulate discussion with stakeholders. • Workshop agenda has been produced to stimulate discussion with stakeholders. • RDPE Network information has been produced for CRC colleagues on the intranet, via What's New and at staff meetings. • Link established and synergies mapped with Defra RDPE Team communications planning.
Output 6 - Contribute effectively to the UK National Rural Network in fulfilment of the Rural Development Regulation Article 68.			
6.1	Contribute information to the development of the UKNRN website specification.	By 11/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website specification developed.
6.2	Contribute information to the development of the UKNRN Action Plan and revised Action Plan in 2009.	By 11/08 + On going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provide summary of needs of RDPE Network within UK NRN. ➤ Provide revised summary, informed by market research and stakeholder engagement project, of needs of RDPE Network within UK NRN.
6.3	Feed in the English perspective and attend UK NRN Steering Group meetings, teleconferences and video conferences (monthly)	On going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaugural UK NRN Steering Group meeting attended. • Informed the development of the Steering Group activity and Terms of Reference. • Monthly VC and teleconf meetings attended and information provided. • Attended Cyprus conference on behalf of UK NRN and RDPE Network.
Output 7 - Infrastructure to support the collation, storage, analysis, evaluation, dissemination and application of Network information, is established.			
7.1	Create temporary RDPE Network website, within CRC website.	By 11/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic website created within CRC website. Further basic information will be added to this website before

			<p>12/08.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RDPE Network e-mail account operational. • RDPE telephone number operational.
7.2	Secure agreement with UK NRN Steering Group regarding specific joint website development for the UK NRN and individual country websites.	By 12/08	<p>Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All four country networks will be establishing their own websites separately due to budgetary and political reasons. • Issues around database compatibility and search compatibility will be picked up as each of these websites are developed.
7.3	Develop RDPE Network website and database specification and complete contract procurement process (joint contract with UK NRN website).	By 12/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form informal steering group to develop website specification • Website specification drafted for comment by UK Steering Group • Finalised specification put out to tender and let.
7.4	Build and Operationalise the RDPE Network website and databases	By 03/09.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website contract tightly managed to deliver appropriate structure and functionality.

Annex 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Relationship Development

Note: This list only includes those stakeholders with whom the Programme Manager has spoken with directly and does not include the stakeholders that are being engaged with via the market research and stakeholder engagement projects (although there is some cross over). A breakdown of these stakeholders can be provided on request.

Europe:

- European Commission
- European Network for Rural Development
- European Evaluation Network for Rural Development
- ECOVAST

UK:

- Carnegie Commission
- Managing Authorities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- RDP Rural Networks in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

England:

- Academia: Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle)
Janet Dwyer (CCRl)
- ACRE
- CRC: Commissioners
Staff
- Delivery bodies: RDAs (National + Regional x8)
Natural England (National)
Forestry Commission (National + Regional x8)
- Defra (RDPE Team, previous LEADER officers, Rural Policy Team, Alastair Johnson (agricultural economics policy)
- Government Offices (National + Regional)
- LAGs (Officers + Chairs)
- Local Authorities European Group
- Networks: Ruralnet
Rural Services Network
Northern Rural Network
National Farmers Network
Evolving IEEP CAP network
- RAF – Chair of Chairs
- RCC Regional Network (SWAN)
- RDPE: Defra RDPE Team
PMC
Programme Board
- Regional RDPE Bodies: East Midlands Regional Consultation Group (this includes a membership of over 30 different organisations with an interest in RDPE)
- Rural Cornwall Partnership

Forthcoming: NFU, EA

Annex 3: Temporary RDPE Network Website Structure

Using the current front page links will be created to different 'sections'. The front page will show the EU, Defra and Leader logos. The 'sections' include:

- **Introduction** – i.e. description of the purpose of the RDPE Network + introduction leaflet
- **What's New** – i.e. to flag up new information that has been added to the site
- **Events** – i.e. add on here the various invites that are being received – from Member States, as well as UK countries, e.g. forthcoming events, the RDPE Stakeholder Engagement events etc. + relevant links, e.g. the IEEP website
- **RDPE Links** – i.e. Defra RDPE page, NE link, FC link and relevant RDA links, specific regional programme sites, e.g. the SW gateway and the RM Regional Consultation Group.
- **Network Activity** – i.e. the Framework and Action Plan document, presentations, discussion papers, market research and stakeholder engagement project, PB, PMC papers, Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan etc.
- **UK NRN** – i.e. link to UK NRN website.
- **European Connections** – i.e. European Rural Development Network + European Evaluation Network + Europa rural development pages + links to other Member State networks
- **The Leader approach** – i.e. Defra currently has a Leader page
- **Publications** – i.e. CRC has a resource library of EC/Leader publications etc. (most of which are available electronically)
- **RDPE Network contact details** - i.e. dedicated telephone number and e-mail address.
- **Temporary discussion area** – i.e. following requests from LAGs.