

POLICY COMMITTEE | AGENDA

Date and time: 19 October 2022 10.00-12.00

Location: Zoom

Any member wishing to submit an apology for this meeting please contact NALC at NALCcommittees@nalc.gov.uk or call on 020 7637 1865.

(Please note there will be a ten-minute break at 11.00)

1. Welcome and apologies (10.00)

2. Business (10:00 – 11:00)

2.1 Motions from county associations

(a) To receive a motion from the Devon county association on 30 miles per hour speed limits on single track rural roads (Ian Cowling from the Devon county association will attend and provide a short verbal update) (15 minutes) – see appendix 2.1

(b) To receive a motion from the Avon county association on exempting local councils from the latest round of government red diesel regulations (Cllr Chris Willmore from the Avon county association will attend and provide a short verbal update) (15 minutes) – see appendix 2.2

2.2. To approve the draft minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2022 (5 minutes)

2.3. To note the action log and raise any other matters (5 minutes)

2.4 To note the notes from the informal session of the Policy Committee of 22 August 2022 (5 minutes)

2.5 Local government finance

(a) Fair and secure funding campaign – update from the policy manager and funding task and finish group (10 minutes).

(b) To note the [NALC analysis of council tax levels of local precepting authorities 2022-23](#) and discuss presentation of government data for areas with and without local councils (5 minutes)

Ten minute break (11.00 – 11.10)

3. Business (11.10 – 12.00 Noon)

3.1. To receive a verbal update on recent engagement with the [We're Right Here campaign for community power](#) (5 minutes).

3.2. Campaigns (20 minutes)

(a) British Parking Association – to consider a supporting the '[Be Kind - Park with Others in Mind](#)' campaign (5 minutes)

(b) Sustainable Communities Act (SCA) update – to receive a verbal update recent engagement with the government, status of the Weymouth Town Council proposal on the Dependants' Carers' Allowance, and updating NALC guidance on SCA (5 minutes)

(c) Better banking campaign – to receive a verbal update on progress with the better banking campaign (5 minutes)

3.3. Levelling Up White Paper and Bill – update on the progress of the Bill and the review of neighbourhood governance (5 minutes)

3.4. Responses to consultations (5 minutes)

(a) Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) inquiry into short term holiday lets (to also adopt a policy position on this following submission of the recent NALC consultation response).

(b) Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) consultation on English portion of Dormant Assets Funding (up to 5 minutes)

3.5. Rural Services Network

(a) To confirm a representative to the Rural Services Network (5 minutes)

(b) To receive a written report from Cllr Burns on the recent Rural Services Network conference (5 minutes) – see appendix 2.6

3.6. White Ribbon campaign – to consider a proposal from the NALC National Network: Women Councillors for NALC to support the [White Ribbon Campaign](#) (Cllr Kay Wesley from the Network will attend for this item) (10 minutes)

4. Date and time of next meeting (12.00 noon)

To note the next meeting of the Policy Committee will be held virtually by Zoom conference call on Tuesday 24 January 2023 (to be confirmed)

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Appendix 2.1

Motion from Devon county association

Topic: 30 miles per hour speed limits on single track rural roads

1. Text

“DALC calls upon NALC to support a change to national speed limit policy enabling local councils to request a 30mph speed limit on single-track rural roads.”

2. Reasoning for the motion

Speed limits are defined by the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (as amended), and highways authorities work within Department for Transport guidance. This guidance states that on single track roads outside communities the national speed limit of 60mph applies, and highways authorities can only apply a lower speed limit under very specific conditions. This guidance assumes that drivers will ‘drive to the conditions’ and adjust their speed as appropriate, rather than seeking to travel at the maximum speed allowed. In the experience of local councils in Devon this framework is inappropriate and ineffective on many country roads, with drivers using excessive speed regardless of local conditions.

The vast majority of member councils in Devon have informed the Devon county association that they want to see a 30mph speed limit on rural, single-track rural roads, either applied to all roads of this type or applied when a council has requested such a change.

3. Prospectus theme

Empower communities

4. How affecting local councils

Local councils are often the first point of contact for road safety issues in their community, and well placed to understand the needs of their community and local circumstances which might warrant a change in speed limit. DALC’s member councils continue to hear concerns regarding excessive speed in and around their communities and find that their concerns have limited traction with the Highways Authority, who are themselves constrained by national policy, capacity and budgetary restraints. As such local concerns regarding speeding are not being resolved.

5. Recommendation

That Policy Committee reach a decision after consideration of this motion at its session on 19 October 2022.

Contact officer: Chris Borg, policy manager T: 07714 771049 e.
chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk © NALC 2022

Appendix 2.2

Motion from Avon county association

Topic: Red diesel

1. Text

“That NALC lobbies central government behalf of Local Councils that they should be exempt from the Red Diesel regulations.”

2. Reasoning for the motion

Imposing a restriction on local councils using red diesel to provide and maintain community open spaces unfairly adds an unacceptable extra cost burden on the local taxpayers, especially when some private businesses (golf clubs) are exempt.

3. Prospectus theme

Empower communities

4. How affecting local councils

Recent legislation has been introduced stating red diesel is no longer able to be used (in certain situations) meaning an increase in fuel costs by approximately 85% to switch to white diesel. (Using rebated fuels in vehicles and machines (Excise Notice 75) from 1 April 2022 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). The legislation states that use of red diesel in mowers and tractors for horticulture is still permitted. Horticulture, according to the government guidance includes flowerbeds, trees, shrubberies and ornamental lawns in public parks. However, they do not regard - as horticulture - the landscaping and maintenance of grassy recreational areas such as playing fields or grassed areas of parks that are made available for walks, picnics and general recreation.

The increased cost of grass cutting and maintaining sports pitches has increased by 85%. Local councils maintaining their own grounds have already seen these increases, those using contractors are likely to see their costs increase over the coming year when they are passed down. To purchase an additional vehicle to do the separate maintenance tasks a local council provides within the community (one using red diesel and one not) is not only expensive but environmentally damaging.

5. Recommendation

That Policy Committee reach a decision after consideration of this motion at its session on 19 October 2022.

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Appendix 2.3

POLICY COMMITTEE | MINUTES

21 June 2022 – 11:00 – 15:00

ZOOM teleconference

Present:

Cllr David Francis (committee chair and Northumberland), Cllr Lillian Burns (Cheshire), Cllr Peter Allison (Yorkshire), Cllr Colin Peacock (Lancashire), Cllr Keith Stevens (NALC chair, ex officio) and Jake Atkinson (County Officer Forum representative).

Guests in attendance: Shelley Parker (Society of Local Council Clerks).

Staff present: Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications) and Chris Borg (policy manager).

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 The committee chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

1.2 An apology was received from Cllr Sue Baxter for the meeting.

Resolved: That the apology be noted.

Business (A)

2.1 Motions from county associations

The committee chair noted that there were no motions received from county associations for this session but that motions received for consideration in the future would be considered at the start of each committee meeting.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

2.2. Draft minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2022

The committee vice chair requested a minor grammatical change to the word “them” on the motions page of the draft minutes from the committee session on 15 March 2022. Otherwise the draft minutes from that session were approved.

Resolved: That subject to the word “they” in the section on county motions be amended to “them” from the draft minutes of 15 March 2022 session, and the draft minutes otherwise approved.

2.3. To note the action log and raise any other matters.

The committee chair asked the committee if there were any changes needed to the action log compiled since the previous committee session on 15 March 2022. There were none.

Resolved: That the action log be approved.

2.4 Fair and secure funding campaign

The policy manager summarized the headline results of the recent survey by the Funding Task and Finish Group on direct funding and other matters. 881 responses had been received in total, with just over half of Super Councils Network councils having responded. Shelley Parker, Jake Atkinson and Cllr Allison (all members of the task and finish group) fed into the discussion, welcoming early findings but agreeing that gaps in the direct funding case evidence needed to be filled.

Resolved: That the committee welcomes the early findings from the finance survey; that the PDF survey summary report be circulated to the committee; and that the next meeting of the group consider the survey findings and undertake further work to identify and fill any gaps and provide a further update at the meeting on 19 October 2022.

2.5 To receive an update on the committee’s work programme 2022

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on the committee’s work programme for 2022-23. Much of the work was already ongoing. However the committee was asked to be flexible with timescales due to staffing changes.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

Business (B)

3.1 To consider new policies on land use for adoption developed by the committee vice chair emanating from the recent response to the Lords Land Use Inquiry

The committee vice chair spoke to a written report in which it was requested that the committee adopt three sub-policies for entry and update to the policy register following the recent NALC response to a national Land Use policy consultation.

There was a debate around each of the three draft sub-policies – spatial planning, rural proofing and renewable energy sources. The committee agreed to adopt the sub policies on spatial planning and rural proofing but to request consideration of the renewable energy sources draft sub-policy at a future National Assembly session.

The committee called for the government to put in place a national planning strategy, and for it to strengthen its rural proofing work and to ensure that it embraces all relevant departments. It wanted to give further consideration to NALC policy positions on the planning aspects of renewable energy, differentiating between different renewable energy technologies, and the possible impact on different types of farmed landscape.

Resolved: That the committee adopt sub-policies as drafted on spatial planning and rural proofing but remain open-minded on the renewable energy sources draft sub-policy which requires further work including more research and should be considered for discussion at a future meeting of National Assembly.

3.2 To receive a verbal update on vacant seats on the committee

The National chair provided an update on filling committee vacancies, confirming that two new representatives to the committee – from the Dorset and Cambridgeshire county associations – had come forward to sit on the committee and that they would be considered for endorsement at the upcoming National Assembly session. Following the next assembly meeting this committee will take immediate steps to bring the new members up to speed and involve them in its work.

Resolved: That the Cambridgeshire and Dorset National Assembly representatives be considered for endorsement as representatives to this committee at the upcoming National Assembly session.

3.3 Rapid Community Initiatives government report

Shelley Parker provided an update on a report recently published by the government (“Rapid evidence review of community initiatives”) . The report had been commissioned by two government departments and analysed the concept of social capital and did not recognise that local councils were a route to community delivery. This was considered to be a big gap. There was no mention made of environmental capital. After a short discussion it was agreed that the report link should be shared with the committee and any essential comments should be sent back to relevant NALC officers ahead of any letter being submitted to the government in brief response. All committee members would read and

digest these documents and share their views. This was a very quick review of various academic studies and conceptualisations of 'community initiative'.

Resolved: That the Rapid evidence review of community initiatives report link be circulated and the committee share further feedback on the report; and that a short response be drafted and sent to government based on feedback received.

3.4 We're right here report on community power

The head of policy and communications provided a short verbal update on the

We're Right Here campaign for community power supported by Big Local, Locality, New Local, Power to Change and others who are seeking a Community Power Act for direct community action and power.

There was a short discussion during which it was highlighted that local councils are statutory bodies where community groups are not. However it was agreed that if local councils are ever to be created in urban metropolitan areas NALC does need to have some engagement with the groups promoting this campaign. All committee members would read and digest these documents and share their views.

The key points of the related manifesto include: a strengthening of the Localism Act 'community rights'; the introduction of community covenants; financial support for new community governance initiatives; the establishment of a powerful commissioner to intervene within communities and to overcome bureaucratic blockages.

Resolved: That the link to the We're Right Here campaign for community power be circulated to the committee; and that NALC make contact with the campaign organisers.

Business (C)

4.1 Sustainable Communities Act

The policy manager spoke to a short-written report regarding local council proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act. The report set out a number of issues and concerns such as non-response, delay and lack of adherence to the Sustainable Communities Act Regulations 2012 by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC formerly MHCLG) which needed to be addressed if the proposal process was to recover and work more effectively in the

future. The committee noted that NALC had already written to the secretary of state but not received a response.

There was a broad discussion during which it was agreed that whilst these issues should be raised with the government, it was also an opportunity to improve awareness of the Act within the local council sector, wider local government and within government.

The most recent proposal submitted under the Act was from Weymouth Town Council to ask the government to grant local councils the same rights to use of the Dependants' Carers' Allowance as principal authorities.

Resolved: That NALC meet with DLUHC officials to highlight recent issues with the government's handling of local council proposals under the Act; that SCA be discussed at a future fortnightly meeting with county officers; and that proposals be developed setting out options for increasing awareness of the Act and ways to improve the current process, guidance and support.

4.2 Campaigns / big themes update

The policy manager provided an update on the climate change, youth and Make A Change campaigns, which were ongoing.

The head of policy and communications provided a short update on national networks confirming that they are a way of sharing good practice amongst participants and not an attempt to bypass the Policy Committee.

Resolved: That the verbal updates be noted; that NALC provide updated information to the committee and county associations on numbers of National Network members by county area.

4.3 Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill – drill down on neighbourhood governance review

The head of policy and communications provided a verbal update that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill had passed second reading in the Commons on 8 June. NALC had had some interest from its issued parliamentary briefing at that stage. However the neighbourhood governance review promised in the white paper had not since emerged in the bill for which reason it was considered prescient to be organising a further special session of the committee over the summer and for a previously circulated paper on new council creation to be considered there, ahead of submission to the relevant bill team.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted; and that a special meeting of the committee be organised over the summer in which the previously circulated positions paper on new council creation be considered to inform further engagement with the government on the neighbourhood governance review.

4.4 Consultations update

The policy manager confirmed that NALC had drafted, submitted and promoted responses to the below three consultations in recent months:

- (a) Lord Inquiry into Climate Change.
- (b) Lords Inquiry into Land Use.
- (c) Landscapes Review.

Resolved: That the written report be noted.

4.5 To receive a list of policy referrals from the Smaller Councils Committee meeting of 24 May 2022

The committee vice chair spoke to a full paper sent to the committee summarising the results of a recent survey of smaller councils commissioned by the Smaller Councils Committee. There was a request for the policy issues of virtual meetings to continue to be pressed and for simplified templates to be created / used for smaller councils as a result of the survey results. The Committee noted that the Management Board would be considering the report and its proposals at their next meeting.

The committee noted that the Management Board would be considering the paper on 5 July, and there was strong support for the simplified templates for smaller councils.

Resolved: That the committee vice chair be thanked for her full and comprehensive report summarising the results of the recent smaller councils survey; that the paper be referred for consideration to county associations, Management Board, National Assembly and the Governance Review task and finish group.

4.6 To confirm a replacement for Cllr Burns to act as the NALC representative to the Rural Services Network

It was confirmed that in due course the committee vice chair wished to stand down as the representative to the Rural Services Network (RSN). It was considered that filling this position was best referred to Management Board and National Assembly, though Cllr Burns agreed to continue at the next session, as the NALC representative.

Resolved: That Cllr Burns be thanked for her service as NALC representative to the RSN and that filling the upcoming vacancy should be referred to Management Board and National Assembly.

5. Date and time of next meeting

5.1. To note the next meeting of the Policy Committee will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday 19 October 2022 via Zoom.. © NALC 2022

Appendix 2.4

Action log

Date	Activity	Item number	Action Complete (Y / N)
21 June 2022	Fair Funding Campaign. ACTION: That the committee welcomes the early findings from the finance survey; that the PDF survey summary report be circulated to the committee; and that the next meeting of the group consider the survey findings and undertake further work to identify and fill any gaps and provide a further update at the meeting on 19 October 2022.	2.4	Y
21 June 2022	To consider new policies on land use for adoption developed by the committee vice chair emanating from the recent response to the Lords Land Use Inquiry ACTION: That the alternative wording to item 5.1 from the minutes of 25 January 2022 committee session be agreed and those minutes be amended with immediate effect.	3.1	Y
21 June 2022	To receive a verbal update on vacant seats on the committee ACTION: That the Cambridgeshire and Dorset National Assembly representatives be considered for endorsement as representatives to this committee at the upcoming National Assembly session.	3.2	Y
21 June 2022	Rapid Community Initiatives government report ACTION: That the Rapid evidence review of community initiatives	3.3	Y

	report link be circulated and the committee share further feedback on the report; and that a short response be drafted and sent to government based on feedback received.		
21 June 2022	We're Right Here report on community power ACTION: That the link to the We're Right Here campaign for community power be circulated to the committee; and that NALC make contact with the campaign organisers.	3.4	Y

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Appendix 2.5

Notes from informal committee session of 22 August 2022

1. Framing / reviewing positions on neighbourhood governance vis a vis the commitment in the Levelling Up The United Kingdom White Paper (02/22)

- There was an introduction from the Committee chair. Cllr Janet Wallace was welcomed. A minister had recently committed that – pending the strategic direction of the new prime minister’s government after 5 September – there would likely be a review of neighbourhood governance undertaken by the government. The review would examine the powers of local councils and making it easier to set them up. **Agreed:** That the policy register would be updated with the position on independent facilitation of all future community governance reviews (as agreed by the March 2021 formal committee session).
- Within the new council sphere there were two aspects which would need to be taken account of – the systemic side and the rural versus urban element (i.e. new urban local councils would likely be different creatures to existing rural local councils);
- The Community Power Act had been discussed at the most recent formal committee session on 21 June. Until the new Prime Minister takes office we will have no idea of how much of a priority new council creation will be for the government. It was also agreed that new local council creation in areas where there were already local councils was sensitive. **Agreed (1):** That the answers to NALC parliamentary questions from 19 July be circulated (attached); that NALC welcomed the new neighbourhood governance review being published in the future in principle; that NALC will have a large role to play, working with county associations, in such a review; policy positions contained in the attached new councils report were endorsed; principal authorities should be reminded through the LGA that Community Governance Reviews must be completed in 1 year; and there should be an appeal mechanism for campaign groups whose campaigns have been unfairly dismissed by principal authorities;
Agreed (2): That NALC engage with relevant newly created councils over the last 5 years to gauge what further changes to the new council creation system are needed.

2. Recommendations - external policy contained in the Smaller Councils Committee's recent research report

- The Committee chair opened a discussion regarding the external policy contained in the Smaller Council's Committees' recent research report. The paper had greatest application to Member Services and the Smaller Councils Committee would need to give the paper further thought.
- The committee chair then went through each of the 9 proposals in turn to gauge the committee's view – these are below with the general consensus marked adjacent (further detail on specified proposals can be obtained in the attached paper):

1. Virtual and hybrid meetings – endorsed;

2. Relationship with principal authorities / how they regard Parish Councils / the need for better communication / consultation / the deterioration of public infrastructure and services and the need for more imaginative service delivery – endorsed (key role for county associations);

3. Performance of principal authorities on planning – endorsed.

4. Need for simplified governance and policy guidance and for contract templates for small councils – endorsed – but would need to ensure that such templates and their contents were not unlawful.

5. Need for legal briefings when new legislation (such as GDPR) is published and for handbooks for burial authorities and facts sheets on matters such as charity law and the pros and cons of having a charity separate from the Parish Council to run a village hall or another entity. Also, advice on: insurance, potential funding streams, taking on devolved services from principal authorities – especially if doing so in collaboration with two or more other Parish Councils – endorsed (with possible case studies) in principle.

6. Need for return of standards regime and adequate sanctions against those who breach the code of conduct – broadly endorsed – providing this doesn't mean NALC is expected to lobby for a return of the Standards Board for England which isn't national policy;

7. Need for documents produced by NALC to be 'proofed' to ensure they relate to both larger and smaller councils – endorsed – there is a need to ensure that NALC documents fairly reflect the spectrum of different size of local council;

8. There are occasions when new or expanded developments in one parish has a disproportionate effect on an adjoining parish, even though it is some distance from the border – endorsed; &

9. Consultations by national government and by principal authorities (and sometimes by NALC) which relate to/ have an effect upon parish councils are often too short – endorsed in principle (but did not agree to 9 week response timescales) - to be applied where time and resource permits.

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Appendix 2.6

RURAL SERVICES NETWORK ANNUAL ON-LINE CONFERENCE, SEPTEMBER 20-23, 2022 INC.

Report by Councillor Lillian Burns

For the third year in succession, the annual conference of the Rural Services Network (RSN) was a wholly on-line affair. However, this year it was compressed into four days instead of spreading over five due to the Queen's funeral being on the Monday of the week it took place. Entitled 'Reducing Rural Inequalities and Improving Opportunities', it featured two dozen external speakers.

DAY 1 - RURAL REGENERATION

Cllr Roger Phillips, RSN Vice Chair, opened the conference by paying tribute to HM The Queen whose funeral had taken place on the previous day. He also thanked the conference's sponsors: the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE), AIRBAND, an independent internet provider, GEMSERV, a data analysis company, OFTEC, a not-for-profit body operating in the heating and cooking sectors and ARQIVA, a telecommunications company.

Graham Biggs, RSN CEO, began by noting that rural productivity fell from 90% of the England average to 83% between 2001 and 2019 and he referenced recent analysis conducted by Pragmatix Advisory. Their report 'Rural as a region: the hidden challenge for Levelling Up', had demonstrated that if 'Rural' were counted as a region, it would be the region most in need of 'levelling up'. It also highlighted that differences within regions were greater than those between regions, ergo the government were wrong to focus attention on entire regions. Also, urban centric mission targets miss the rural struggle, e.g. the

employment rate does not account for seasonal unemployment, the quality of jobs or dependency on multiple jobs and travel-to-work metrics fail to capture the infrequency of rural public transport

(<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/rural-as-a-region-the-hidden-challenge-for-levelling-up.pdf>). The report was published in June this year.

The Rural England Prosperity Fund, (allocating £110m to support projects that will boost the rural economy), had recently been announced by DEFRA – to be delivered from April 2023 via local authorities

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-england-prosperity-fund-prospectus>).

However, it raised a lot of questions and the RSN were trying to find out further information from DEFRA. Graham Biggs also commented that 21 members of the new cabinet of 31 MPs represented rural constituencies. He thought that this was a fairly unique set of circumstances.

Dr. Maria Wishart, research fellow from the University of Warwick, spoke about the four-part ‘State of Rural Enterprise’ (SORE) work which was ongoing by the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE). Led by Newcastle University, it was being carried out by five universities, including her own, along with other partners. Some 4,000 rural businesses across three English regions – the North East, the South West and the West Midlands – had been surveyed.

The first resulting report was ‘Infrastructure and networks: rural enterprises and the Levelling Up agenda’

(<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/mediav8/nicre/files/NICRE%20State%20of%20Rural%20Enterprise%20Report%20No%202%20May%202022%20Infrastructure%20an>

%20networks,%20rural%20enterprises%20and%20the%20Levelling%20Up%20a
genda.pdf), published in May. The second one, 'Farm business performance:
planning adaptation and resilience', was published this month (September
2022)

(<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/mediav8/nicre/files/NICRE%20State%20of%20Rural%20Enterprise%20Report%20No%203%20September%202022%20Farm%20busin%20ess%20performance%20-20planning,%20adaptation%20and%20resilience.pdf>).

Two more reports were to come.

The survey, which is to be repeated in 2023, had revealed that during the COVID pandemic only 10% of rural businesses took advice from business advisers.

Nonetheless, many of them – notably farms – performed well during that time.

But, although they demonstrated strong resilience then, they were now likely to be depleted. Rural businesses were less likely to have risk management plans than urban ones. There was a strong reliance on family members who often drew very low wages. The research had confirmed that many basic rural services were poor and there was a significant difference in broadband provision, transport and affordable housing between rural and urban areas.

Charles Trotman, senior economist at the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), spoke about the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Businesses and the Rural Powerhouse and the report they published earlier this year, i.e. 'Levelling Up the Rural Economy: an inquiry into rural productivity'

(https://www.cla.org.uk/documents/502/Levelling_up_the_rural_economy_-_APPG_report_2022_ONLINE_pdf.pdf).

The report, sponsored by the CLA, was produced following a series of evidence-taking sessions which had revealed a

consensus that no government in recent memory had produced a programme to unlock the economic and social potential of the countryside.

The report had focused on six areas: (1) Planning, which Charles Trotman described as “a major barrier to economic development” and “desperately in need of reform”, (2) Tax, where there needed to be a recognition that “one size does not fit all” and which needed to incentivise business, (3) Digital Connectivity, where there was a need for a wider skills base and closer working between interested parties, (4) Farming, where the need was to boost productivity, achieve better balanced supply chain relationships and solve labour supply problems e.g. by allowing prisoners to work on the land, (5) Green Skills, covering the need to ring-fence funding for rural communities and apprenticeships and (6) Improved Processes such as creating a Rural Productivity Unit in each relevant government department and strengthening the concept of rural proofing.

Vincent Muspratt, the Director of Growth and Development at Norfolk County Council, spoke about Norfolk’s experience of the Community Renewal Fund, although he began by explaining that Norfolk had over 900,000 inhabitants – a figure which was expected to rise to a million soon. His team, he said, was over 100 in number and his remit covered spatial and transport planning and apprenticeships as well as the economic portfolio.

Helped by the Local Enterprise Partnership, eight members of staff from Norfolk CC’s external funding team had submitted a total of 26 projects (reduced from 60) to the Community Renewal Scheme – all aimed at addressing Norfolk’s historic economic underperformance. Some 14 were successful and £6.2m was

awarded to work them up. They included potential energy solutions, a net zero sustainable transport network and youth enterprise and apprenticeship projects. But, when the Shared Prosperity Scheme was announced, it revealed that none of Norfolk's projects had been taken up, apparently indicating a disconnect between the two government initiatives.

Vince Muspratt also commented on the fact that his team were required to work on these bids for government funding at the same time they were working on the ones for the Levelling Up Fund 2.

RURAL REGENERATION PRESENTATIONS

Graham Biggs MBE, "Introduction to Rural Economic Regeneration", please follow this link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-regeneration-session/rural-regeneration.pdf> .

Dr Maria Wishart "The State of Rural Enterprise: Key Insights for Rural Regeneration", follow link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-regeneration-session/the-state-of-rural-enterprise-key-insights-for-rural-regeneration.pdf> .

Charles Trotman "Using the Rural Powerhouse towards economic regeneration", follow this link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-regeneration-session/using-the-rural-powerhouse-towards-economic-regeneration.pdf> .

Vince Muspratt "Norfolk's experience of the Community Renewal Fund", please

follow this link:

[https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-](https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-regeneration-session/norfolks-experience-of-the-community-renewal-fund.pdf)

[regeneration-session/norfolks-experience-of-the-community-renewal-fund.pdf](https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-regeneration-session/norfolks-experience-of-the-community-renewal-fund.pdf) .

The Rt. Hon Lord Benyon, DEFRA parliamentary under secretary of state/ Minister for Rural Affairs and Access to Nature and Biosecurity, spoke of the cost of living crisis – caused, he said, by the war in Ukraine and the aftermath of COVID. Higher fuel prices had particularly hit rural households who were not on the gas grid, he commented. The reaction from the new prime minister had been to announce an energy price guarantee alongside tax cuts and special measures for businesses. The need, he said, was to promote economic growth as productivity fell to 81% in rural areas in 2020.

Speaking on the afternoon of the first day of the conference, he praised the APPG ‘Levelling Up the Rural Economy’ report sponsored by the CLA [reference and link on previous page under report about Charles Trotman’s presentation] which he described as “a fantastic blueprint for what we need to do”. He also said DEFRA were “immensely grateful” for the information the RSN provided and referred to the Rural Area Prosperity Fund and the Rural Development Programme for England and the government’s desire to “improve infrastructure”, adding: “More than anything, we need to improve digital connectivity. It is a matter of social justice”. He said the government were investing £5bn in ‘Project Gigabit’ to make improvements and were setting up ‘gigabit hubs’ for areas with poor service. He promised more training for civil servants on rural proofing and concluded by declaring that the government were on a mission to ‘level up’ – and that included rural areas.

DAY 2 - RURAL HEALTH, CARE AND WELLBEING

Councillor Cecilia Motley, RSN Chair and Shropshire County Council cabinet member, introduced the speakers starting with the Rt. Hon. Philip Dunne, M.P., chair of the APPG for Rural Services.

Philip Dunne said that the energy relief scheme announced by government that morning would provide relief for hospitals, social care services and other health care services. It would apply to all contracts taken on since April 1st and it will take effect from October 1st. He explained that he was speaking on the day before the secretary of state for health, Therese Coffey, would be announcing a new plan for health. [This was subsequently announced. The Department of Health and Social Care press release is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/health-and-social-care-secretary-sets-out-plan-for-patients-with-new-funding-to-bolster-social-care-over-winter> and the policy paper is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-for-patients/our-plan-for-patients>].

People working in health had been under enormous pressures in the last two and a half years, he said, adding his “huge thanks” to everyone involved in delivering help. He also said he was looking forward to working closely with Therese Coffey and Robert Jenrick M.P., both of whom he pointed out represented rural area, and he spoke of the “additional challenges” that existed in rural areas.

Referring to the Health and Social Care Bill, Philip Dunne explained that it changed the structure of how health was delivered. Primary care and social care were coming together, leading to a more joined-up approach, and there would be closer working with local authorities. Primary Care Networks would be established with GP networks grouped together. Surgical capacity was to be increased across 100 hospitals and improved diagnostic centres were to be provided. The first ones would be in metropolitan areas but the second wave would cover rural areas. On the social care side, there was a need to retain staff. Journey times of the staff involved needed to be covered by care providers. Some providers did cover these, but not all.

Graham Biggs spoke of the impacts of under-resourcing in rural areas. He pointed out that, according to 2019 figures, alcohol specific conditions were 30% higher in under 18s, type 2 diabetes was 18% higher and ‘looked after children’ (5-16-year-olds) were 15% higher than in urban areas.

Pip Cannons, Community Catalysts chief executive, spoke of unlocking communities’ capacity to care, quoting the government mantra: “A healthy place is one which supports and promotes healthy behaviours and environments and a reduction in health inequalities for people of all ages” and the Social Care Futures vision: “We all want to live in the place we call home, with the people and things we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us”.

Because people are all different and their needs are different, they should be offered a real choice from a wide range of services, she said. A “one size fits all” approach cannot meet the need. That said, health care services are already stretched and demand is growing, access to it varies between urban and rural areas and funding is limited. The focus, therefore should be on what communities and people have, rather than that they lack, and helping them to use their ‘gifts’. In other words, the need is to unlock the reservoirs of energy and creativity which exist. Pip Cannon’s organisation, she explained, works with micro enterprises – local people helping local people, encouraging individuals to become carers and ensuring that the micro enterprises were functioning within the regulations. Initiatives such as hers mean that people can come home from hospital earlier than would otherwise be the case – and feel less lonely.

Mark Cooke, South West Strategy & Transformation Director, NHS England & NHS Improvement, explained about the Integrated Care Systems that had now been established following the Health and Care Act of 2022. These have replaced the Clinical Commissioning Groups, bringing closer working with local authorities and others. Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) have four key purposes, he explained: improving outcomes, tackling inequalities, enhancing productivity and supporting broader social development. They have many shapes and sizes. The south west one covers six million people but represents a huge dispersed geography that extends over 18% of England's land mass. Looking superficially at the health statistics for the region, things appeared to be 'quite good' but a closer examination of local areas reveals that there are many localised problems ranging from poor quality public transport, which affects access to health facilities, to a lack of hospital beds. The latter problem had been partially tackled by the conversion of a former warehouse in Exeter into the Nightingale Hospital and partially by minimising primary recovery times for many procedures.

Gareth Elliott, Director of Policy & Communication at Mobile UK, spoke of how his company were working towards the government's targets for mobile connectivity and how technology can help to bring down social care costs. He referenced a recent report published by his company: 'Connected Care', which highlights the potential that mobile connectivity can offer to the challenges that principal authorities face in delivering adult social care (<https://www.mobileuk.org/connected-care>). Its recommendations were that local authorities need to put infrastructure at the heart of their local delivery plans, they needed to continue the promotion of full fibre and 5-G deployment, they should be supporting and leading the transition to adopting digital applications, they should be making available public assets for mobile deployment and they should be appointing digital champions to help turn the vision for 'connected care' into reality.

Laura Hodge, Strategy & Regulatory Analyst at Arqiva, explained that her company operates the terrestrial TV and radio network which reaches 98.5% of the UK population through Freeview. Digital Terrestrial TV (DTT) and radio was integral to people's lives, she said, and she spoke of recent research by Ipsos which showed that 9 in 10 people wanted to see continued support for it. The research also showed that more than 8 in 10 people believe government or local MPs should actively support the continued provision of these services on which older people, the less well off and rural areas rely. Currently, there are no government plans committing to the future of DDT and radio and therefore a campaign was launched this summer by a coalition of broadcasters to raise awareness of this (<https://www.arqiva.com/news-views/news/broadcast-2040-campaign-launches>).

Kerry Booth, RSN chief executive designate who will become CEO in April 2023, quoted a series of statistics that highlighted the inequalities suffered by rural areas. They included the following:

- rural residents make up almost a fifth of the population of England and a higher proportion of them are older people than in urban areas
- in sparsely populated areas over 30% of residents are aged 65+ compared to 18.5% nationally
- rural areas get 37% less in government funding than urban areas
- rural residents pay on average £104 per head more in council taxes than urban residents
- due to the higher costs of supplying statutory services, rural councils have less than urban ones left to spend on discretionary services (libraries, leisure facilities, toilets, parks, youth services, buses)
- excluding London, it costs 40% more to purchase an average home in rural areas compared to urban
- affordability is further affected in areas with a large % of second homes (eg. 7.3% in Lake District)
- dispersal of central government funds is inequitable (little of £7bn transport pot came to rural areas)
- GVA per job is £45,400 in predominantly rural areas compared with £51,700 in mainly urban areas
- Many rural economies support lots of seasonal low paid jobs, but finding a career can be difficult
- In 2020, the average fuel poverty gap per household was £193 in urban areas and £223 in rural ones

Graham Biggs, the current CEO, criticised the fact that the metrics in the government's Levelling Up White Paper were focused at the regional level. The need, he said, was for metrics to be measured at the right level to ensure differences within regions were highlighted and considered. Government policies must be fit for purpose in a rural context. He called for fairer funding for rural public services to ensure rural communities were not disadvantaged and their LAs had more discretionary spend. And the need was not just for capital funding. Revenue funding was as important. Other 'Asks' were for funding for a rural affordable housing programme, support for homes and businesses not on the gas grid, the rural proofing of adult social care programmes and the development of a rural strategy for transport. And he drew attention to the RSN's campaign for a comprehensive rural strategy.

RURAL HEALTH, CARE AND WELLBEING PRESENTATIONS

Graham Biggs MBE, "Introduction to Rural Health, Care and Wellbeing", please follow this link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-health-care-and-wellbeing-session/introduction-to-rural-health-care-and-wellbeing.pdf>

Pip Cannons, “Healthy communities – helping communities unlock their capacity to care” link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-health-care-and-wellbeing-session/healthy-communities-helping-communities-unlock-their-capacity-to-care.pdf>

Mark Cooke, “Transformation in Rural Health” link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-health-care-and-wellbeing-session/transformation-in-rural-health.pdf>

Gareth Elliot, “Technology in health report” link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-health-care-and-wellbeing-session/technology-in-health-report.pdf>

Laura Hedge, “The Value of Broadcast” link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-health-care-and-wellbeing-session/the-value-of-broadcast.pdf>

Kerry Booth, “Reducing rural inequalities – impact of current approach on rural communities”: :

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rsn-session/reducing-rural-inequalities-impact-of-current-approach-on-rural-communities.pdf>

Graham Biggs MBE, “Improving Opportunities for Rural Communities – what do we want from Government” link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rsn-session/improving-opportunities-for-rural-communities-what-do-we-want-from-government.pdf>

DAY 3 – RURAL HOUSING

Cllr Roger Philips introduced Graham Biggs who set the scene for the session. Rural communities, he said, should be diverse and inclusive. Currently they have a disproportionate number of older people and a growing population of those aged over 85.

A supply of affordable housing would be the answer to the problem, he contended, and a supply of affordable housing keeps families’ local support networks intact. In addition, a supply of affordable housing benefits the rural economy – with employers able to recruit and retain staff. However, there had been a migration into rural areas as a result of COVID and this had had an impact on house prices – a situation which had been exacerbated by the second homes market, the proliferation of Airbnbs and the ‘Right to Buy’. The Levelling Up White Paper had pledged that, by 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership

and, elsewhere, the government had said that tenants renting their homes from Housing Associations should be able to take advantage of the 'Right to Buy'. The RSN did not support this happening in rural areas, Graham Biggs said.

The White Paper had also contained a promise that the number of non-decent rented homes will have fallen by 50% by 2030 – with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas. But it said nothing about housing being less affordable – to buy or to rent.

Ursula Bennion, chief executive of Trent and Dove Housing Association and retiring chair of the Rural Housing Alliance, began by explaining that Trent and Dove have 7,000 homes in Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. She also announced that, having served an extended term as chair of the Rural Housing Alliance due to the COVID situation, she was shortly to hand over the chairmanship to Angela Gascoine, chief executive of Sedgemoor Housing Management Services.

Ursula Bennion posed the question – why is affordable housing important? Answering her own question, she said that they created balanced communities. This was particularly important in rural areas where the percentage of retirees and older people was high. Also, local shops benefitted from the local patronage, as did schools, local services, pubs and a wide variety of local businesses. She went on to talk about the Rural Mapping Project, which was work in progress. The intention was to identify the gaps in rural housing delivery. A national survey had been conducted and 63 local authorities had responded to it. This was showing a very complex picture across England, but it was identifying a decline in the appetite of Housing Associations for rural developments and it was also apparent that more and more Housing Associations were adopting a threshold below which they will not develop. The most common threshold in the SW and SE was 20 dwellings. When the mapping project was complete, the Alliance would be coming forward with a series of suggested actions.

Martin Collett, English Rural Housing Association chief executive and Rural Services Partnership director at the RSN, explained that his housing association was a smaller, specialist, one with 1,500 homes, operating across the south of England. He spoke of wellbeing inequalities which, he pointed out, took many forms – citing physical, social and mental wellbeing and demographic, economic and income inequalities and also what he called 'the inequality of stigma', with established residents in communities worrying about what affordable houses might look like and who might live in them.

He highlighted the report 'Rural Recovery and Revitalisation' that the RSN published in 2020 with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), making the case for investing in rural affordable housing (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e970559d0f0db64b20536d6/t/6206951>

[8dd73201be20db346/1644598566084/2020-10+Rural+recovery+and+revitalisation.pdf](#). Noting that there are often objections from existing residents in communities to new developments, he endorsed Graham Biggs' point that it was essential to have mixed, more sustainable, communities with increased diversity.

JANE Trethewey, assistant director in the homes & communities directorate at Shropshire CC, provided a profile of her county, explaining that it covered 1,235 square miles but its population was only 325,415. Some 57.2% of the population lived in rural areas. Average household income was not high, the majority of rural households were not connected to the gas network and there was a lot of fuel poverty. There were huge challenges such as remoteness, the road distances that needed to be covered, the lack of public transport, homelessness, a diminishing number of affordable homes (due to the Right to Buy) and newbuild development constraints. These are being tackled through closer working with parish councils, Homes England, the Combined Authority of the West Midlands and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. Also, the Council was gathering better data via a housing needs survey, working on community-led housing schemes and providing entry-level homes (including some rented) through its own company, Cornovii Developments Ltd.

Nutrient neutrality regulations affected a large part of South Shropshire covered by the River Clun catchment area, meaning that it was not possible to deliver homes in that area of special conservation. However, the CC were working with DEFRA and DLUHC on mitigation measures.

RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRESENTATIONS

Graham Biggs MBE, "Introduction to Rural Affordable Housing", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-affordable-housing-session/introduction-to-rural-affordable-housing.pdf>

Ursula Bennion, "Improving Rural Opportunities – Affordable Housing for Local People", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-affordable-housing-session/improving-rural-opportunities-affordable-housing-for-local-people.pdf>

Martin Collett, "Reducing inequalities – What role can affordable rural housing play?", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-affordable-housing-session/reducing-inequalities-what-role-can-affordable-rural-housing-play.pdf>

Jane Trethewey, "Rural Affordable Housing in Shropshire", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-affordable-housing-session/rural-affordable-housing-in-shropshire.pdf>

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Graham Biggs explained that the RSN 'Rural Cost of Living' report, launched that day, had been commissioned from consultants Kovia prior to the most recent rises in the cost of living and yet, even without taking those into consideration, it demonstrated that a devastating triple blow was pushing rural communities into a cost of living emergency. The report identified the key threats as being higher household costs (heating, rent and house prices), higher transport costs and lower wages (<https://rsnonline.org.uk/new-report-shows-devastating-triple-blow-pushes-rural-communities-in-a-cost-of-living-emergency>).

Kovia's research found that rural homes tend to be less energy efficient, with 60% of them having an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of 'D' or below. Rural households face a greater fuel poverty gap, have a higher average weekly spend on food and the difference in transport costs was described as "astonishing" by Graham Biggs. A greater percentage of rural employees than urban ones earn less than the real living wage (£9.90) and, for those rural workers who were in the lower 25th percentile of earnings, it meant that they had to pay a higher proportion of their earnings for rent. In rural villages and hamlets, the housing premium for purchasing properties was 55%. Following the launch of the report, there was a panel discussion on the cost of living emergency.

DAY 4 - RURAL NET ZERO

Opening the last day of the conference, Cllr Cecilia Motley harked back to the cost of living debate at the end of the previous day, making the comment that principal authorities in rural areas received 37% in government funding per head less than those in urban areas. This meant the residents had to pay more in council tax for the same services.

Setting the scene for the session on 'Net Zero', Graham Biggs was critical of the government's focus on heat pumps as a source of environmentally-friendly heating because, he said, they had not taken into account the very high costs of them. He also pointed out that the majority of on-shore energy generation takes place in rural areas and he referenced his "Rural Lens Review" of the government's net zero strategy (<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/net-zero-strategy-rural-lens>) and the letter sent by the Rural Coalition, of which the RSN is a member, to the Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change. The letter had stressed that rural areas need alternatives to be offered so that they can use their cars less.

Simon Green, founder and CE of the Rural Design Centre, also speaking on behalf of Community Action Northumberland and NICRE, spoke on rural community energy. He had set up the Rural Design Centre to focus on rural challenges, not policy, bringing together communities and business where possible. The sort of challenges that were being addressed ranged from providing electric charging points to identifying and designing more appropriate housing for older people, thereby freeing up larger houses for families.

Work on rural community energy began with a single village hall in Northumberland whose trustees wanted to decarbonise and save energy. This prompted investigations into a range of community buildings, which threw up many common issues. Now a community energy company had been established and detailed surveys had been carried out on 19 buildings. A plan for a co-operative had been developed that would take charge of delivering improvements and a second phase of work involved a further 20 buildings. The rise in the scale of the enterprise had opened up new financial options. From a net zero viewpoint, it was anticipated there would be a minimum of 30% energy cost savings and 3,000 tonnes of carbon saved. Some funding had come from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and some from DEFRA through the North East Energy Hub and the first installations of identified solutions (which ranged from solar slates on some buildings to the use of battery storage) was due to begin next year.

Emma Osmundsen, M.D. of Exeter City Living, (a profit-for-purpose limited company which is a spin-off of Exeter City Council), talked about delivering low-carbon/climate-ready homes in a cost-effective way, using public money.

Exeter City Living had recently adopted the UK 'Building with Nature' standards (<https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/>), she said. They looked at everything from the design of rainwater goods to ensuring that properties had the correct amount of shading. They had also adopted the Standard of Building Biology (SBM) Testing Methods, which were designed in Germany (<https://buildingbiology.com/building-biology-standard/>), looking – amongst other things – at radiation. And, all their developments met the Passivhaus (low energy) building standards (https://www.passivhaustrust.org.uk/what_is_passivhaus.php). All Passivhaus (passive house) buildings were well insulated with a continuous airtight barrier, high performance windows and doors, optimised solar orientation and compact building form. There was an equivalent standard for existing homes, Emma Osmundsen explained, but it was very difficult to achieve. Exeter had been a pioneer of Passivhaus in the U.K. It had completed over 200 homes across the city and was currently working on a 91-home site. Its aim was to provide 1,000 Passivhaus homes by 2027.

Samantha Shea, head of policy insight, and Rory Matthews, senior economic analyst, both of Gemserv, gave a joint presentation on 'Rural Retrofit'. They

described Gemserv as a professional service company specialising in energy solutions that works in the low carbon sector.

They referenced the UK government's 'Heat and Building Strategy' published by BEIS in 2021 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heat-and-buildings-strategy>) and, setting aside the cost of buying and installing heat pumps and biomass boilers, a key benefit of such equipment, they maintained, was that they typically saved between 75% and 90% in greenhouse gas emissions.

Flagging up issues around rural homes, they pointed out that there were efficiency challenges related to the size of properties, the density and the locations – all of which impacted possible solutions. Hydrogen might be suitable in some instances and should be considered.

However, homes off the gas grid would first need to tackle the matter of insulation before installing new heat sources. They needed loft insulation, solid wall insulation, double glazing and energy efficient doors. It would cost an estimated £23,300 for a typical detached property in a rural area to introduce all these measures – but there would be long-term gains. And, in order for these improvements to be widely available, there was a need for a properly skilled supply chain. Analysis had shown that preparing the UK for a net zero outcome could support hundreds of thousands of green jobs. There was a role, they said, for local government and for advice centres to explain to individuals who already had some relevant skills how they could transition to jobs in fitting and retro-fitting low carbon options.

Malcolm Farrow, head of public affairs, and Paul Rose, chief executive officer, both of OFTEC, spoke about decarbonising rural heating and achieving a fair and affordable transition.

Like the previous speakers, they acknowledged that decarbonising rural heating would be a challenge and they also referenced the BEIS 'Heat and Building Strategy' of last year. However, they focussed strongly on renewable liquid fuels as being a key solution.

They pointed out that whilst the UK target to achieve net zero is 2050, it also has a target to achieve a 78% reduction in harmful emissions by 2035 and drew attention to the fact that buildings account for 30% of all emissions and to the fact that heating makes up a significant proportion of that (23%). Some 86% of homes use gas heating. Whether hydrogen would be a feasible alternative was still an unknown and there were many questions around heat pumps such as which homes would be considered suitable for them. Similarly, it was unknown how long the £5,000 subsidy towards heat pump installation would remain and, in any event, the cheapest type of heat pump cost £13,000.

Declaring that the government should abandon its 'one size fits all' approach, Paul Rose championed the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), a biofuel that can be produced without fossil resources by processing vegetable fats and oils. He said it was a stable product, unlike some earlier bio-fuels, it is likely to work in all existing oil heating systems and it offered a net GHG/CO2 reduction of 88% over Kerosene. The conversion required for existing boilers would only take a couple of hours and cost about £500. So far trials had been conducted on 20 sites over 120 homes and non-domestic buildings in 12 different areas around the UK and some were coming up to their second birthday.

However, HVO is currently more expensive than heating oil and it is taxed differently and the government has yet to make a decision about whether renewable liquid fuels should be used in heating or reserved purely for transport. Also, supplies of HVO into the UK (where there is no current producer) are being limited and it is attracting a 30p per litre import tariff. This presentation closed with a referral to the website of 'Future Ready Fuels' - www.futurereadyfuel.info.

RURAL NET ZERO PRESENTATIONS

Graham Biggs MBE, "Introduction to Rural Net Zero", please follow this link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-net-zero-session/introduction-to-rural-net-zero.pdf>

Simon Green, "Decarbonising rural energy – a collaborative approach in Northumberland", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-net-zero-session/decarbonising-rural-energy-a-collaborative-approach-in-northumberland-communities.pdf>

Emma Osmundsen, "Delivering future ready homes", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-net-zero-session/delivering-future-ready-homes.pdf>

Samantha Shea & Rory Matthews, "Rural Retrofit – Challenges and Opportunities", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-net-zero-session/rural-retrofit-challenges-and-opportunities.pdf>

Paul Rose and Malcolm Farrow, "Decarbonising rural heating – achieving a fair and affordable transition" link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-net-zero-session/decarbonising-rural-heating-achieving-a-fair-and-affordable-transition.pdf>

RURAL TRANSPORT

Opening this last session of the conference, Graham Biggs expressed scepticism about the transport mission (Mission No. 3) in the Levelling Up White Paper. It was that “By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing”. It was very unclear how the government would address spatial disparities.

Also, in April, many rural local authorities had voiced their anger following the announcement of the funding allocations. The headline to the announcement was that there was a £7bn package to level up transport outside London. But, only £1.08bn had been allocated to the Bus Service Improvement Plan for the entire country. £5.7bn of the headline figure was in respect of the ‘City Regions Sustainable Transport Settlement’ that was announced by the Chancellor in the Autumn statement. This after most local authorities had expended considerable time and effort bidding for funds.

John Birtwistle, head of policy at First Bus, listed the challenges and opportunities that existed, ranging from the impacts of COVID to the state of the labour market and from funding sources to partnership working. He announced that First Bus were about to take delivery of their first carbon-free buses, vehicles that offered a much quieter and smoother ride. The aim was for First Bus to be 100% diesel-free by 2035. That said, he pointed out that even a diesel bus was cleaner than 30 cars and that the DVLA had the power to remove from the roads any vehicles which were too polluting.

Buses were great value for money, providing essential links, and there was a health aspect as people had to walk to bus stops. But, providers needed funding certainty, joined up thinking from national and local government, the enforcement of parking restrictions by bus stops and more bus lanes.

On the topic of demand-responsive transport, he said that this sometimes worked well. He thought that the Lincolnshire Connect scheme was an excellent one. (This scheme has connecting buses that link up small villages and then meet up with strategic cross-county buses). But there was no guarantee of funding. He repeated the comment that was made by other speakers in the health and energy sessions – that one size does not fit all. There must be the right solutions to fit the problems.

Councillor Adam Paynter, RSN Vice Chair and deputy leader of the Independent Group and also Miriam Binsztok, service manager for transport services, both from Cornwall Council, made a joint presentation, pointing out that much of Cornwall is not on a rail network and therefore a good bus service was very important.

Cornwall declared a climate emergency in January 2019, setting a target to become carbon neutral by 2030 – encouraging the switch to public transport. A One Public Transport System for Cornwall (OPTSfC) had been running since 2015. This already has 194 new low-emission buses, most offering wi fi and USB chargers. Bus stations have been upgraded in Newquay, Penzance and Truro, real-time information is displayed at rail stations and bus shelters have been upgraded. The government's 'Bus Back Better' scheme, launched last year, required local authorities and bus operators to have enhanced partnerships and to develop Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs). Cornwall's BSIP aimed for simplified fare structures and cheaper fares, greater reliability, integrated networks and integrated information, improved infrastructure and reduced carbon. A 'tap and cap' system across all operators has been introduced, allowing easy payment by card and, so far, over 655,000 reduced fares have been sold. Patronage was getting close to pre-COVID levels. Now a centralised legal entity – Transport for Cornwall (TfC) – has been established to support and manage transport information.

Renee van Baar, principal transport planner & rural mobility lead at Midlands Connect, explained that Midlands Connect covered both the West and the East Midlands and included many rural areas.

In 2019 the University of Lincoln were employed to do a 'Future of Rural Mobility' study. They discovered that 58% of the population live outside the main cities and 24% of the rural population is over 65 and 11% of respondents to the survey they conducted had missed or suffered delayed medical treatments as a result of public transport problems. In 2020 Midlands Connect began developing Rural Hub Guidance. (A local hub being a public space designed to accommodate multiple local level services). The guidance was produced in 2021 and grants were given to Derbyshire County Council and Nottinghamshire County Council to test it. These trials were ongoing.

Also, over 2021 and 2022, Midlands Connect had run a 'Rural Mobility' competition which required 'contestants' to take part in a Dragons' Den final pitch. The winner had been 'Cenex', a lift-sharing, car-sharing and charge point-sharing scheme aimed at residents and local businesses in Buxton and the Hope Valley. The runners up were DB Engineering & Consulting who, in partnership with East Lyndsey District Council and Lincolnshire LEP, developed a shared minibuss and car trips scheme and City Science who had developed an on-line planning and analysis tool for planning better transport provision. The intellectual property of the schemes will be publicly owned and best practice shared.

RURAL TRANSPORT PRESENTATIONS

Graham Biggs MBE, "Introduction to Rural Transport", please follow this link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-transport-session/introduction-to-rural-transport.pdf>

John Birtwistle, "The Future for Rural Buses", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-transport-session/the-future-for-rural-buses.pdf>

Cllr Adam Paynter and Miriam Binsztok, "Bus Fares Pilot – Cornwall Council", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-transport-session/bus-fares-pilot-cornwall-council.pdf>

Renee van Baar, "Improving Rural Transport", link:
<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/conference/rural-conference-2022/rural-transport-session/improving-rural-transport.pdf>.