

ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

This report provides an overview of the achievements of the Hampshire Rural Forum during the period July 2017 to June 2018.

Forum background

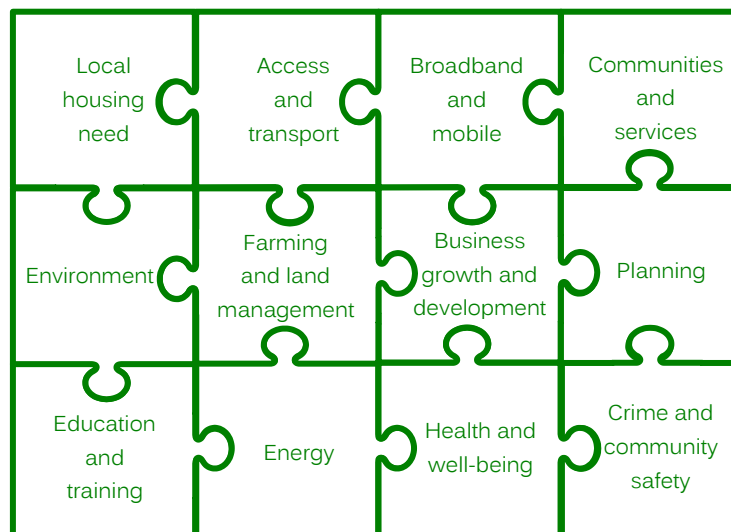
The Forum was originally established in 2009 to act as an overarching advisory body for rural matters in Hampshire. As the Forum had not met for some years, in 2015 Councillor Humby, in his capacity as Hampshire County Council Lead Member for Rural Affairs, contacted organisations previously involved in the Forum to seek views on its potential re-establishment. Overall there was great support for revitalising the Forum and of the need to ensure there is an overarching body to bring together rural interests in Hampshire. A decision was therefore made to re-establish the Forum to include a core Steering Group as well as a wider Forum network of interested parties.

The first meeting of the newly established Steering Group of the Forum was held in June 2016 where a Chair was elected, and the broad aims, objectives and governance of the Forum was agreed.

Forum remit

The Hampshire Rural Forum brings together organisations, groups and individuals with a concern for the economic prosperity and well-being of businesses and communities in rural Hampshire. It works to bring together the pieces of the 'rural-jigsaw' to raise understanding, find solutions and provide opportunities for collaboration. This is embodied in the aim and objectives of the Forum set out in the [Terms of Reference](#).

The 'rural jigsaw'



Forum membership

The Forum is open to anyone with an interest in rural Hampshire and as of June 2018 has 58 member organisations. This is made up of a core Steering Group of 14 member organisations and a wider network of interested parties. For a full list of members see the [Terms of Reference](#).

Governance

Hampshire County Council, as a member of the Steering Group of the Forum, has fulfilled the role of Accountable and Lead Body. Up to December 2017 it also provided a secretariat function which has included convening and co-ordinating meetings, co-ordinating consultation responses and managing all Forum communication with members. The secretariat function was taken over by Action Hampshire from January 2018.

The elected Chair of the Forum, Mike Ridout, from the Wessex Rural and Farming Network, has dedicated a considerable amount of time to oversee the role of the County Council and of Action Hampshire and provide an overall direction for the work of the Forum. Other members of the Steering Group, including Hampshire County Council and Action Hampshire, have contributed meeting venues and refreshments.

The Steering Group, made up of 14 member organisations, guides the work of the Forum. It met three times (4 July 2017, 7 November 2017, 13 March 2018) and agreed on key rural issues to help determine where the Forum's efforts should be focussed (e.g. consultation responses, hot topic meetings).

Finance

In June 2017, the Hampshire Rural Forum had a balance of £17,611.70, originating from funding received in 2005 via a DEFRA Rural Pathfinder Grant. The costs of the Forum, up to 30 June 2018 are outlined below:

Item	Cost
Secretariat	£6332.00
VAT	£630.00
Meeting venue costs	£474.64
VAT	£0.43
Total costs	£7437.07
<i>In-kind contributions</i>	<i>£390.00</i>
<i>Recoverable VAT</i>	<i>£630.43</i>
<i>Actual spend</i>	<i>£6416.64</i>
<i>Closing balance – 30/06/2018</i>	<i>£11,195.06</i>

Key achievements

6 'information snippet' e-newsletters
1 consultation response
3 'hot topic' meetings open to all members
1 contribution to local initiatives

- **6 'information snippet' e-newsletters sent to all members**

'Information snippets' were introduced in August 2016 as a way of sharing information on rural matters that may be of interest to members. This includes national updates (e.g. government reports and statistics, research, articles) as well as local information, opportunities and events shared by members.

- **1 consultation response**

The Forum decided to submit responses to one national consultation on issues impacting on rural areas. All Forum members were given the opportunity to contribute towards the consultation responses and from this a collective response was submitted. Individual members submitted their own responses to other consultations during the year.

- **A new broadband Universal Service Obligation: consultation on design, October 2017** – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport sought views on the specification for a broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) to be set in legislation. The Forum response provided examples highlighting: the potential presented by fixed wireless solutions for rural areas; alternative solutions and the value of local service providers working with communities to deliver innovative solutions; locally driven initiatives to demonstrate that communities can successfully collaborate to show evidence of demand.

- **3 'hot topic' meetings open to all members**

Following feedback from members on their priority issues, 'hot topic' meetings have been held. These meetings are open to all Forum members and provide a means to hear the latest information on a topic, share different perspectives and allow a platform for discussion on shared solutions. The 'hot topics' addressed in 2017/18 include:

- **Fly-tipping, 4 July 2017** – the Forum heard from: Hampshire County Council about the new Hampshire Fly-tipping Strategy and the next steps for its implementation; a Hampshire farmer/landowner about his experiences with fly-tipping; a company based in rural Hampshire that is developing some technology to help tackle fly-tipping.
- **Resilience not reliance, rural communities and services, 7 November 2017** – led by Action Hampshire, the meeting featured examples of successful social and community businesses

that were addressing local issues and gaps in service provision; a presentation from the newly appointed Community Housing Officer whose role is to encourage community-led housing solutions through Community Land Trusts, housing cooperatives and self-build schemes.

- o [The Future for Hampshire's Natural Environment, 13 March 2018](#) – three organisations involved with land management shared their perspectives on the impact for Hampshire of the Government's "A Green Future: our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment". The organisations were the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Hampshire County Council Countryside Service and Hampshire & the Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

- **1 contribution to local initiatives**

The Forum and its members have contributed towards one major initiative addressing issues impacting on rural Hampshire.

- o [Hampshire Fly-tipping Strategy](#) – a member organisation, Hildon, has been appointed to represent the Forum on the working group to progress the implementation of the Hampshire Fly-tipping Strategy.

The year ahead

The Hampshire Rural Forum would like to take this opportunity to outline the key issues, identified by the steering group and through feedback from others, to be addressed during the forthcoming year.

Rural harmony - the responsible use of the countryside.

The countryside is able to bring many recreational and health benefits to the general public. This was recently identified in the report "Recharging Rural" published by the Prince's Countryside Trust (July 2018). The report, however, also highlighted that those in rural communities do not appear to be understood by the wider public. This, in turn, brings tensions and conflicts over the use of the countryside in areas such as the use by motorcyclists, bicyclists, drone operators and metal detectorists. The Forum is looking to host a 'hot topic' in the autumn on the solutions that have been adopted by rural communities to address such tensions.

Rural connectivity - a light at the end of the cable

Rural connectivity is reported on widely and is often amongst the top priority concerns for rural businesses and communities. The Forum will take the opportunity during the year to revisit the approaches that rural communities have used to ensure sufficient infrastructure to meet their information technology needs.

Rural prosperity and sustainability

Whatever happens, there will be life after Brexit. The Forum is intending to explore strategies that will be needed by rural businesses and communities to remain prosperous, resilient and sustainable in the years ahead.

In addition, the Forum will be looking to be actively involved in engaging with the Hampshire County Council Hampshire 2050 initiative. This initiative does provide an opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the future of rural Hampshire, this is to be welcomed. The opportunity, however, will only be of benefit if the quality of the contributions is such that they help inform and develop realistic recommendations and are owned by those who will be impacted upon by their implementation.

Message from the Chair, Mike Ridout

When I was asked to write this contribution to the 2017-18 Hampshire Rural Forum Annual Report and comment on the way forward then I must admit I was unsure what to write in view of the turmoil in the external operating environment impacting on rural businesses and communities.

It would be easy to comment on A Green Future: Our 25 year plan to improve the environment; Health and Harmony: the future for food farming and the environment in a Green Brexit; the awaited green paper on care and support for older people; the outcome of the of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy; and rural broadband (that surpasses speeds in South Korea!)

I then began to consider the three points of the rural development triangle: economic, social and environment and how these reference points are still relevant and as with all things in life, it is a question of balance. In looking back over the past year the Hampshire Rural Forum has endeavoured to focus on these underlying principles (in a balanced way) through the hot topics that have been organised and keeping members of the forum aware of matters of interest through the snippets that are published.

In thinking about the year to come the three words that hopefully describe the focus of the Forum are: Connectivity; Contribution; Community. This is perhaps illustrated by the recent report of how the villagers (community) in Michaelston Fedw worked together in laying optic fibre and connecting properties to provide a broadband speed of 1GB. At a very practical level, the local public house is now able to accept card transactions. This is probably quite useful as it is estimated that only 40% of transactions now use cash (compared to 62% in 2016). This simple example perhaps illustrates the importance of the community working together to ensure appropriate conductivity to contribute to its economic prosperity and wellbeing. The challenge for the Hampshire Rural Forum is to continue to act as a catalyst in bringing together (connecting) the different organisations, groups and individuals

involved in rural communities to raise understanding and awareness of the contribution made by rural businesses and communities to the economic prosperity and wellbeing of Hampshire.

I would take this opportunity to thank members of the Steering Group for their help and support together with the wider forum members for their feedback and attendance at the 'hot topic' meetings. I would also acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Amanda Hull and Jo Dixon in making things happen behind the scenes.

An even greater challenge for the Forum, in the near future, will be to address the need to be self-supporting and this will only be achieved through the Forum being seen to have a value, a purpose and an identity.

Comments from Steering Group members

The vital role of the Forum is to remind policymakers at all levels of the importance and size of the rural economy, and its crucial support for our natural environment.

The Forum has proved very useful in highlighting national issues that have impact on the rural businesses and communities of Hampshire and how best they can mitigate them going forward.

HRF has had in depth discussion on subjects that concern Hampshire's rural residents and employers and from those discussions it has had influence with the relevant agencies.

On behalf of Hampshire County Council I would like to thank Mike and Jo for their work as Chair and Secretariat roles over the past year and of course fellow members of the Forum, for continuing this collective focus looking to tackle the challenges facing our Rural Communities.

This is an important time for the County Council as we look to progress our commitment to the rural agenda and in developing our relationships with rural partners and local councils. With an increased investment to our Rural Programme, and the inclusion of the Rural Theme in the Commission of Enquiry supporting our 2050 Vision, we would hope the opportunity the Forum provides to debate and provide a collective view of rural stakeholders will continue and provide further steer to our work.