

RCAN Steering Group – Purpose and Membership

The RCAN Steering Group was set up in April 2009 as an independent body to oversee and steer progress with the national RCAN/Defra Agreement.

The main activities of the Steering Group are:

- Review consolidated performance monitoring reports prepared by ACRE on outcomes from the investment in RCAN and recommend action to be pursued by ACRE staff where risks to successful delivery are identified
- Advise on matters arising from strategic influencing activities and how best to promote any success and expertise demonstrated
- Receive reports from the Programme Manager on the administration of the contract and recommend any actions necessary
- Review any commentary, feedback or reports from Defra or Capacitybuilders and recommend action as appropriate
- Keep under review the contract business plan and risk management strategy and report key risks and progress to the ACRE board of trustees
- Act as the decision-making body on applications to the Network Development Fund, in line with the Fund's agreed protocol
- Seek to ensure that ACRE provides best value for Defra's investment and fulfils its role as the accountable body for the contract.

The RCAN Steering Group currently comprises five members, who give their time and expertise without remuneration:

John Mills CBE (Chairman of the RCAN Steering Group)

John has had a lengthy and wide-ranging career in the public service, both at home and overseas. In the UK Civil Service his posts included being Head of International Telecommunications at the former DTI, a member of the No.10 Policy Unit under Mrs Thatcher and Mr Major, Director of Consumer Affairs at the Office of Fair Trading, and, up until his retirement in 2007, Director of Rural Policy at Defra, where in particular he led the development of the Rural Social and Community Programme and the subsequent, present arrangements governing the Rural Communities Action Network. At Defra John also had a broader responsibility for the Department's relations as a whole with the voluntary and community sectors, and with local government and regional organisations.

John spent four years in the 1980s on secondment to the Government of Hong Kong, and in the 1990s resigned from the Civil Service to become Chief Executive of Cornwall County Council. He then became Chief Executive for Policy and Resources in Jersey before returning to the Civil Service in his role at Defra.

He now has a portfolio of non-executive roles, paid and voluntary. On the latter front, his chairmanship of the RCAN Steering Committee apart, in Jersey he is a member of the Island's parliamentary remuneration review body and an income tax commissioner of appeal; he also chairs the governing body of Highgate School, London, which is a charity by Royal Charter. He is vice-chairman of the Port of London Authority, a member of the Commission for Rural Communities, and a Commissioner of the Jersey Financial Services Commission.

John was educated at Highgate and at the University of Oxford, where he took first class honours in Modern History and subsequently, having been appointed a Domus Senior Scholar at Merton College, obtained the higher degree of B.Litt for research on the late medieval university.

John now lives primarily in Jersey, where his wife runs the largest singing school in the British Isles, but he also spends time at his residence in Cornwall, which is his particular window on the challenges and opportunities facing rural England.

Andrew Robinson MBE

Andrew is a director of CCLA Investment Management Limited, the largest cash and investment manager for charities in the UK. His other current appointments include being a trustee of the Community Development Foundation, a non-departmental public body of Communities and Local Government; the Lankelly Chase Foundation, the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres, and London Funders. He is also a Special Advisor to the Development Trusts Association. He was awarded an MBE for services to social and community enterprise in 2003.

Previously, Andrew was the head of Community Development Banking for RBS and NatWest, Chairman of the UK Sustainable Investment and Finance Association and chaired the steering group that led to the establishment of the Community Development Finance Association. He was also a founding trustee of the UK Social Enterprise Coalition.

Andrew's first job in the UK was to establish the UK's first community development finance institution (CDFI) to lend money to community enterprises operating in the most disadvantaged communities. He was also a member of the government's review of the community ownership and management of assets, chaired by Barry Quirk CBE and the Fabian Society Commission on Child Poverty, chaired by Lord Victor Adebowale. Prior to these roles he worked for the Royal Bank of Canada, a foundation and a health-related charity.

Pat Holtom

Pat has worked extensively in both the public and private sector in rural areas and was Rural Development Officer for Norfolk County Council for seven years developing social, environmental, community, training and economic projects in the Norfolk Rural Priority Areas. She was involved with a variety of funding activities, appraising bids, evaluating their outcomes and advising on bid writing for local community and charitable organizations.

Pat is a Trustee of ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) and sits on the Finance & Human Resources Sub Group and Vice Chair of the East of England Regional Forum. She is currently Chair of the Local Area Group which developed the successful LEADER bid for the Waveney Valley. Previously a rural Board member of the East of England Development Agency, she is now working as a freelance consultant specialising in rural issues.

In the past, she ran a smallholding, making cheese and yoghurt, keeping goats, sheep, pigs, bees and growing fruit and vegetables. A keen musician she plays violin in the Wymondham Symphony Orchestra and is a member of her local choir. She remains a dedicated gardener and an active advocate for the rural economy.

Stuart Gibbons

Stuart joined the RCAN Steering Group in November 2009. Stuart has broad experience of the rural agenda and runs his own rural consultancy specialising in community and economic regeneration. He is experienced in leading and project managing social and economic change programmes within the rural sector. This includes working with charities, social services, schools and colleges and a range of rural businesses.

Previously he was Head of Rural Regeneration for Kent County Council where he initiated and managed the Kent Rural Board (the strategic focal point for Kent's rural agenda), was responsible for the Leader, Small Rural Towns and Access to Rural Services Programmes along with Produced in Kent, the County's food group. He also set up and managed a range of rural partnerships at a local, regional and international level.

Specific interests include rural innovation, food security and change management. He lives in the Kent Downs where he manages a small livestock farm.

Tessa Hilder

Tessa joined the RCAN Steering Group in November 2009. She brings many years' experience of managing the delivery of grant funds, from previous roles at the Heritage Lottery Fund (1996 to 2006) and English Heritage (1985 to 1996). As Head of HLF's South East Region, a significantly rural region, she led the Fund's engagement with regional strategic issues and partners working with rural communities. Rural areas were an important focus for investment, from market towns to historic community buildings, local museums and attractions, wildlife sites and landscapes.

Now living in rural Kent, where her family farmed for generations, Tessa is a freelance funding adviser. In particular, she works for the Funding Buddies service run by Action with Communities in Rural Kent, providing grassroots community organisations with mentoring support and advice on fundraising. She supported ACRK in developing a successful bid and business case securing funding from the Big Lottery Fund's BASIS II programme to run Funding Buddies for a further 3 years. Tessa is also a member of the ACRK and Colyer Fergusson Charitable Trust Small Projects Grants Panel, which distributes grants for rural community projects.