



This year's Rural Life Conference will explore the government's vision of self-reliant communities proposed in the forthcoming Community Empowerment White Paper.

The Rural Community Action Network has been empowering communities and helping them towards self-reliance for many decades. The work of the network has helped at least 4,000 communities develop a blueprint for their future through community-led planning. But government aspirations for empowering communities may not fit with long-standing rural practice.

A key strand of the conference will be exploring how RCAN's support for rural communities may need to adapt to a very different landscape. Rural traditions in community-led planning, community ownership of assets and the role of parish councils are all consistent with the White Paper's aims, but not necessarily with its delivery. Delegates will be able to participate in the development of a strong rural response to the proposals to help shape the various initiatives within the White Paper, based on best practice and experience.

This is a participative conference, where delegates can both learn and debate each of the principles of community empowerment adopted by government and how that relates to current rural practice.

There are four workshop strands running through the conference:

- Developing community-led planning for the future with communities and local government working together
- Community-led service delivery and affordable housing provision
- Supporting community ownership of assets and affordable housing
- Community governance and the development of the parish council model.

The conference will result in a resounding body of evidence which will be used in future influencing strategies. Papers arising from this evidence, along with presentations given at the conference and workshop findings will be posted on www.acre.org.uk/events_RLC08.html from Wednesday 18th June.

Thursday 12th June

9.00 - 11.00

Registration

11.00 - 12.00

Opening Plenary Session

Introduction: *Sylvia Brown, Chief Executive, ACRE*

Plenary Speaker: *Peter Unwin, Director General, Natural Environment Group, Defra*

12.00 - 13.15

Workshop Sessions 1

1.1 Community-led planning - an integrated solution to community empowerment

Gabriel Chanan

Sylvia Brown, ACRE Chief Executive

How does the rural model of community-led planning fit with the landscape generated by the Local Government Act and initiatives being developed under the forthcoming Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill. Delegates will be invited to contribute ideas around future development of community-led planning guidance and practice to sustain and develop its ability to deliver genuine community empowerment.

1.2 Show and Tell - a multi media testimony on rural poverty

Sue Shaw, North East RCC's Regional Co-ordinator

A film by the Rural Media Company, followed by discussion on how, in this new arena of empowerment, those whose poor quality of life is often masked by surrounding rural affluence can be given an effective voice.

1.3 Empowerment through asset ownership

Tony Rich, Rich Regeneration/Development Trust Association

Advancing Assets supports a number of local authority pilots to work with local community groups to transfer ownership or control of local buildings and facilities. Delegates are invited to explore how communities could capitalise on lessons learned to develop new and varied community initiatives.

1.4 Just another consultation exercise?

Rob Hindle, Rural Innovation

Comprehensive Area Assessments will transform the way local government accesses information and monitors performance on service provision and the priorities of local residents. How can we avoid consultation fatigue, and how can communities themselves take a lead on providing information and participating in an effective dialogue with service providers?

13.15 - 14.15

Lunch served in Comus Restaurant. Main exhibition area open.

14.15 - 15.30

Workshop Sessions 2

2.1 Community-led planning – doing it well

Celia Collett, Oxfordshire Rural Community Council

Amanda Greenwood, Chief Executive, Community Development Exchange

Parish & Community Plans and the nine step process. Delegates will be invited to identify what makes a fit-for-purpose parish plan and how a structured process makes a difference. How do we measure success and impact? Can 'green' parish plans deliver behavioural change?

2.2 Rural Proofing – CLOSED WORKSHOP - (please note this workshop starts at 14.00)

Rob Hindle, Rural Innovation

2.3 Exploring sustainable community assets

Deborah Clarke, ACRE Village Halls Officer

Penny Velander, New Forest District Council

With the spotlight on transfer of community facilities to community control, what can research tell us about rural communities, who already own and maintain nearly 9,000 village halls. Evidence from investment programmes, local surveys and community-led plans show that they lead a precarious existence whilst playing a crucial role in supporting community life. What challenges and opportunities lie ahead for those 80,000 volunteers that manage these important assets?

2.4 Who represents my community?

Justin Griggs, NALC

The Local Government Act 2007 aimed to strengthen local elected representatives but also promoted participative democracy by instituting direct links between individuals & community organisations and statutory agencies. Does this create tensions between representative and participative democracy and can the rural model of parish partnerships provide a solution?

15.30 - 16.00

Main exhibition area open for networking and refreshments

16.00 - 17.15

Workshop Sessions 3

3.1 Community-led planning – A route to beacon council status

Lee McQuade and Mark Harris, West Berkshire Council

A case study seminar exploring how three councils that gained beacon status for community engagement through their use of parish plans are now delivering a peer support project for other councils as well as continuing to develop their own approach.

3.2 Rural Proofing – CLOSED WORKSHOP

Rob Hindle, Rural Innovation

3.3 The potential for Community Land Trusts

Steve Bendle, Community Finance Solutions

'Then we will do it ourselves' is a research report which explored seven affordable housing CLT schemes across the country. How can communities be encouraged to look at such models of provision and where does it fit with the wider aspects of the forthcoming Community Empowerment, Housing and Regeneration Bill?

3.4 Collaboration is good for everyone

Neil Casey, National Support Service Collaboration

Sylvia Brown, ACRE Chief Executive

Capacitybuilders investment in infrastructure created a number of national support services, one of which, led by bassac, promotes collaborative activity between third sector organisations. As part of this initiative, ACRE intends to research a number of pilots based on the parish partnership model to deliver better and more sustainable use of community resources. This seminar will explore the overall programme plan and how it intends to achieve its aims.

17.30 - 18.30

Plenary session

Chair: Keith Harrison, Chief Executive, Action with Communities in Rural Kent

Keynote speaker: Catherine Johnstone, Acting Chief Executive, Capacitybuilders

19.15 - 20.00

Drinks Reception, Keele Hall

20.00 - 00.00

Conference Dinner, Keele Hall

Note: There will be a minibus available to delegates to take them to the drinks reception and dinner from outside Lindsay Court main entrance between 19.00 – 20.00.

It will make the return journey to Lindsay Court between 10.30 - 00.30. The bar closes at midnight.

9.00 - 10.15

Plenary session *Chair: Canon John Brown, Chair, ACRE*
Welcome: Ken Cleary, Chairman, NALC

Plenary Debate with the delegates: Communities, land use and innovation: Visions for the future

Keynote speaker: Ron Scrutton, Deputy Director, Rural Policy Division, Defra

Keynote speaker: Frances Rowe, One North East

Chaired by: Pat Holtom, ACRE trustee

10.15 - 11.30

Workshop Sessions 4

4.1 Community-led planning – does it work in urban communities?

Kathrin Luddecke, Oxfordshire County Council / Rebecca Carley, Oxford City Council

A case study on how local authorities took the structured approach to community-led planning and tested it in three urban neighbourhoods and the conclusions available so far. How was the nine step process modified to match a different context and what lessons have been learned? Delegates are invited to discuss this and any additional examples of using community-led planning in urban areas.

4.2 New ways of financing rural affordable housing

Sue Chalkley, Hastoe Housing Association

Hastoe has published a major report into alternative ways of facilitating and financing affordable housing without reliance on social housing grants. In the lead up to Matthew Taylor MP's review on rural housing and the economy, together with the publication of the Community Empowerment, Housing and Regeneration Bill, can the proposals in this report point the way to better opportunities to secure a decent place to live?

4.3 Transport and quality of life

Angela Wilkinson, Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council / Mark Powell, Community Council of Shropshire

This seminar will feature two different projects aimed at improving people's ability to access employment and services. In both, local RCAN members worked with local people and institutions to facilitate or deliver a service that could transform the lives of local people and their ability to travel. What was the catalyst for this and how can partners be brought on board to support such initiatives?

4.4 The power of well-being and quality parish councils

Justin Griggs, NALC

Since its early beginnings, the quality parish scheme was seen as a way to reinvigorate community governance and deliver more active and empowered communities. The Local Government Act 2007 will now allow eligible parish councils to have a general power of well-being to benefit their communities. Are these likely to change the roles and stature of parish and town councils and how will they contribute to empowering local residents?

11.30 - 12.00

Main exhibition area open for networking and refreshments

12.00 - 13.15

Workshop Sessions 5

5.1 Community-led planning – a credible voice for communities

Matthew Bell, Devon County Council / David Wood, Rural Action East Regional Co-ordinator

Creating an action plan database and monitoring progress with implementing the actions. How can the collated action plans be used to successfully influence statutory agencies? How far have we got with creating comprehensive evidence across local authority areas and regions?

5.2 Do it yourself

Case studies involving local communities who decided that the only way to make a service available in a community was to do it themselves. The session will feature examples of social enterprises, local community self-help initiatives and other ways in which communities have taken control through community action.

5.3 Supporting affordable rural housing

Arlene Kersley, Community Council for Berkshire

Affordable rural housing is a key policy issue, central to Matthew Taylor MP's review of rural housing & the economy, and a key issue for the sustainability of rural communities. How does the loss of a comprehensive network of Rural Housing Enablers affect the provision of affordable rural housing? What alternatives are there to the RHE model? What new opportunities are likely to arise from the Taylor review?

5.4 Charters, protocols and participatory budgeting

Crispin Moor, Commission for Rural Communities, ACRE trustee / Stephen Wright, South West ACRE Network

How does the government's emerging plan for neighbourhood charters relate to existing charters between local authorities and parishes and the growth of parish plan protocols linking local authorities with community-led plans? Could the parish precept mechanism, coupled with a community-led action plan, provide a vehicle for participatory budgeting exercises and devolved funding?

13.15 - 14.00

Lunch served in Comus Restaurant. Main exhibition area open.

14.00 - 14.45

Plenary Session

Can innovation in rural community action provide lessons for delivering community empowerment? What do we need to see in the Community Empowerment, Housing and Regeneration Bill to ensure that rural community empowerment goes from strength to strength?

14.45

Close of conference

Action with Communities in Rural England Conference 2008

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN ACTION - At a glance

	Chancellors Building - Exhibition Suite	Chancellors Building - Westminster Suite	Workshop Room CBA 1.100	Workshop Room CBA 0.007	Workshop Room CBA 1.099	Workshop Room CBA 1.098
Wednesday 11th June						
15.00 - 20.00	Early arrivals and exhibition set-up					
19:00 - 20:00	Dinner - Comus Restaurant					
Thursday 12th June						
09.00 - 11.00	Registration and exhibition set-up					
11.00 - 12.00		Opening plenary session: Introduction by: Sylvia Brown, OBE, Chief Executive, ACRE Keynote speaker: Peter Unwin, Director General, Natural Environment Group, Defra				
12.00 - 13.15	Networking		1.1 Community-led planning - an integrated solution to community empowerment	1.2 Show and Tell - a multi media testimony on rural poverty	1.3 Empowerment through asset ownership	1.4 Just another consultation exercise?
13.15 - 14.15	Lunch will be served in the Comus Restaurant					
				Starts at 14.00		
14.15 - 15.30	Networking		2.1 Community-led planning – doing it well	2.2 Rural proofing - closed workshop	2.3 Exploring sustainable community assets	2.4 Who represents my community?
15.30 - 16.00	Networking & refreshments					
16.00 - 17.15	Networking		3.1 Community-led planning – A route to beacon council status	3.2 Rural proofing - closed workshop	3.3 The potential for Community Land Trusts	3.4 Collaboration is good for everyone
17.30 - 18.30		Plenary session: Chair: Keith Harrison, Chief Executive, Action with Communities in Rural Kent Keynote speaker: Catherine Johnstone, Acting Chief Executive, Capacitybuilders				
19.15 - 20.00	Drinks Reception - Keele Hall					
20.00 - 23.00	Conference Dinner - Keele Hall					
Friday 13th June						
09.00 - 10.15		Plenary session: Chair: Canon John Brown, Chair, ACRE Welcome : Ken Cleary, Chair, NALC Plenary session Debate: Communities, land use and Innovation - Visions for the future Keynote speaker: Ron Scrutton, Deputy Director, Rural Policy Division, Defra Keynote speaker: Frances Rowe, One North East Chaired by: Pat Holtom, ACRE Trustee				
10.15 - 11.30	Networking		4.1 Community-led planning – does it work in urban communities?	4.2 New ways of financing rural affordable housing	4.3 Transport and quality of life	4.4 The power of well-being and quality parish councils
11.30 - 12.00	Networking & refreshments					
12.00 - 13.15	Networking		5.1 Community-led planning – a credible voice for communities	5.2 Do it yourself	5.3 Supporting affordable rural housing	5.4 Charters, protocols and participatory budgeting
13.15 - 14.00	Lunch will be served in the Comus Restaurant					
14.00 - 14.45		Closing plenary session: Gabriel Chanan & Sylvia Brown Can innovation in rural community action provide lessons for delivering community empowerment? What do we need to see in the Community Empowerment, Housing and Regeneration Bill to ensure that rural community empowerment goes from strength to strength?				
CLOSE OF CONFERENCE						

**Thank you for attending this years ACRE conference.
We hope that you have a safe journey home.**