

## Rural Community Councils – Background Information

### Action with Communities in Rural England<sup>1</sup>

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country. ACRE aims to promote a healthy, vibrant and sustainable rural community sector that is well connected to policy and decision-makers who play a part in delivering this aim.

### The Rural Community Action Network and Rural Community Councils<sup>2</sup>

The Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) is the collective name for the 38 Rural Community Councils (RCC) throughout England, their eight regional bodies and their national umbrella, ACRE (see Annex 1).

The aims of the Rural Community Action Network are to:

- Support community led action and strong local governance
- Increase the long-term sustainability of local community life
- Influence policies and services, particularly to achieve equity for rural communities.

RCCs are charitable local development agencies, which support and enable initiatives in rural communities. They act as a strategic voice for rural communities, allowing grassroots issues to be championed and solutions worked out in partnership between statutory, voluntary and private sector providers. RCCs provide a local support network for rural community groups, including dedicated expertise in arenas such as transport, housing, the management of community-owned facilities, social enterprise and rural services.

RCAN members collectively employ around 1,000 staff throughout England and have a turnover that varies by county between £250,000 and £2.6 million per annum. The total national network annual turnover is more than £40 million.

The eight regional networks of RCCs play an increasingly strategic role in linking grassroots experience with the work of regional development agencies, government offices and third sector regional bodies. ACRE's role at national level mirrors the role of the regional groupings of RCCs in acting as a key advocate and strategic partner in national government policy development and third sector activities. ACRE also provides the focus for work that is either common or aims to be consistent across regions, ensuring that RCCs and

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.acre.org.uk](http://www.acre.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [www.acre.org.uk/aboutthenetwork\\_index.html](http://www.acre.org.uk/aboutthenetwork_index.html)

rural community sector interests are appropriately supported throughout the country<sup>3</sup>.

### **Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC)<sup>4</sup>**

Oxfordshire Rural Community Council was founded in 1920, the first Rural Community Council in England. It is a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity. The Board of Trustees administers the charity and appoints a Chief Executive to manage the day-to-day operations of the charity. The Chief Executive has delegated authority, within terms of delegation approved by the Trustees, for operational matters, including finance and human resources<sup>5</sup>. All employed and voluntary staff are based at ORCC's Jericho Farm offices in Witney.

The ORCC works to improve the quality of life for those who live and work in rural Oxfordshire. It currently has just over 500 members, which includes both individuals and organisations. The aims of the ORCC are attached at Annex 2.

ORCC works in partnership with the District Councils, the County Council and a wide range of voluntary organisations and community groups. These include the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association, the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (who share the premises at Jericho Farm) and the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils.

In 2008 the ORCC was awarded ACRE Level 2 Quality Standards accreditation following an external review of all its activities. The accreditation means that funders and service users can be confident that ORCC are a high-quality organisation delivering a well planned and well managed service that meets the needs of communities in rural Oxfordshire. The review identified three areas of excellence:-

- The interface with communities through the Village Shops Development Worker and the direct support given to communities, social enterprise and independent shops was excellent.
- The Village of the Year competition had analysed results from the entries received for the competition to provide in depth information of those villages, which has potential to enrich the data held about rural communities in Oxfordshire.
- The Rural Housing Enablers had good and direct links with local authorities, named housing associations and also spoke about an active interface with parish plans.

---

<sup>3</sup> Action with Communities in Rural England Corporate Plan, 2008 - 2011

<sup>4</sup> [www.oxonrcc.org.uk/](http://www.oxonrcc.org.uk/)

<sup>5</sup> Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, Financial Statements For the year ended 31 March 2008, <http://www.oxonrcc.org.uk//media/Annual%20report%202008.pdf>

**Rural Community Councils: National, Regional and Local Levels**

**Action with Communities in Rural England**

