



Policy Position Paper: Climate Change and Environmental Action

Rural communities have greater potential than most to take action to address the impacts of climate change. They can develop innovative approaches to both change individual behaviour and promote sustainable lifestyles through collective action.

Summary statement

Climate change is already happening in the UK. Behavioural change, individually and collectively, in reducing CO² emissions is a crucial priority for all. But reductions in the use of the car and increasing fuel costs have a disproportionate impact on rural communities. Rising temperatures bring changes in weather patterns, rising sea levels and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. More isolated rural communities will be the last to benefit from public sector interventions. On the other hand, rural communities have a stronger role to play in addressing climate change impact because they are self-governing, they already own most of their community assets and facilities. They have a unique relationship with surrounding land assets and a tradition of self-help that can be harnessed to develop community initiatives.

Specific solution: RCAN role in delivering – summary statement

ACRE believes that behavioural change is more powerful when climate change impact is made locally relevant and collective action by local people reinforces initiatives aimed at addressing climate change priorities. Rather than preaching to communities about global impacts, the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) aims to work with them to identify local solutions and generate new approaches and new opportunities. In this way all sections of the community become engaged, including those who may not be attracted to action on climate change issues alone. RCAN embeds carbon reduction measures within its support for community action and encourages local community groups to reduce the use of resources such as energy, fuel and water.

RCAN has successfully initiated numerous community projects that contribute to the climate change agenda. Opportunities are being promoted and supported for communities to harness local community assets for energy production, introduce community-based transport schemes to reduce reliance on the car and ensure local community-owned facilities adopt energy efficient practices in both their design and their use. Communities have been encouraged to devise their own emergency plans to cope with extreme weather conditions. RCAN's 21st Century Village project, begun in 2006, set the scene for communities to take more control of their own sustainability.

ACRE's rural vision

Our vision is that rural communities will increasingly take a leading role in ensuring the social, environmental and economic well-being of all their residents. They will do this in a way that provides for the present generation and also plans for future needs and future challenges. RCAN members will be there to stimulate their thinking, support their work and help turn their aspirations into reality.

Issue; Planning for the future

Everyone has a role to play in tackling climate change, from reducing their own emissions to planning for adaptation. However, some initiatives have to be taken by local people working together within their community and many require widespread support from local residents to be successful.

Solution – Local community action

RCAN's delivery of support and facilitation for community led planning has been instrumental in generating the interest of local communities in exploring local projects to combat the impacts of climate change. Since 2007 RCAN has delivered an initiative on local community action called the **21st Century Village** project (www.acre.org.uk/sustainabledevelopment_21stcenturyvillage.html). This has shown that, by stimulating dialogue amongst groups and individuals within a community, ideas and volunteers come forward to create a myriad of collective initiatives.

Both the South East and West Midlands RCAN regions have produced resources showing how local groups can '**green**' their community led plan. Examples such as greening your village hall, offering local recycling facilities, car share schemes, veg-box pick-up points and the use of bio-fuel heating, crop up time and time again. The Rural Community Action Network supports communities to then implement local projects.

RCAN members in the East of England have been actively involved in **Cut your Carbon**, a scheme funded by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA). RCAN officers, knowledgeable in climate change and renewable technology issues, encouraged communities to explore, measure and reduce their carbon footprint and take action to become more energy efficient. Funding of £750k was provided to implement local carbon reduction action plans in 10 communities. Renewable energy technology was supported in buildings ranging from village halls, a local business, a school partnership and a cathedral. Contact was made with over 100 more communities interested in developing projects relating to carbon reduction and climate change.

Issue: the need to cut CO² emissions

The UK has ambitious targets for reducing emissions and everyone has a role to play in reducing their energy use. Rural England has nearly 9,000 community buildings which are owned and run by local community groups. Most are experiencing the direct impact of fuel costs and increasingly aware of the benefits of addressing energy usage. However, these are all volunteer management committees who need dedicated support to be able to make significant changes to achieve this.

Solution; saving energy in community buildings

Energy efficiency audit services are provided by RCAN members for community buildings and village halls throughout England. Recommendations are then offered on how to reduce carbon and save money through installing new systems or simply changing working practices. This includes no/low cost measures, such as composting, rainwater harvesting and improved insulation, as well as major investment in heating and renewable energy systems. Greening a community building is often the catalyst for individual behavioural change – local users take home the lessons learned on reducing energy costs.

Whilst most actions are small, there are some outstanding examples of new halls which have benefited from RCAN advice on sustainable construction.

Rock Village Hall in Worcestershire demonstrates best practice in the sustainable construction. Hemp was used for insulation and recycled plastics for the underground drainage. Recycled aggregates were used in the foundations and all of the timber came from Forestry Stewardship Council sources. A Ground Source Energy system heats the building and water for the toilets is provided by a rainwater harvesting system.

In **Ollerton with Marthall, Cheshire**, the community used the evidence documented within their Community Led Plan to successfully bid for Big Lottery funding to develop a new 'eco' village hall. This will provide for an environmentally friendly, sustainable and economically viable facility serving the community well into the future.

A new, unique village hall has recently been constructed for the **Norfolk villages of Neatishead, Irstead and Barton Turf**, partially funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Locally harvested straw is the main insulation material and this will be rendered by hand using lime. The building is timber-framed (using recycled products where appropriate), has a green roof, uses rain water recycling, uses solar power and will be heated using a ground-source heat pump system. A number of successful community involvement days were held, with over 170 local people, old and young alike, visiting the site and helping to transfer the straw bales into the building.

Issue: Extreme weather events

Extreme weather events are set to increase in frequency. Snowfalls and flooding will become more common, with significant impact on isolated rural communities and exposing the most vulnerable people to significant risk.

Solution Emergency planning and support

Two different approaches are showcased below. One involves an initiative taken by an RCAN member to create a network of support for elderly rural dwellers; the second relies on RCAN members supporting local communities to devise their own emergency plan.

The **Village Agents scheme** run by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council employs part time support workers to ensure the needs of people aged 50+ living in rural areas are met. 28 Village Agents provide high quality face-to-face support, helping individuals make informed choices and putting people in direct contact with the appropriate agency. This proved particularly beneficial during the Gloucestershire flooding emergency in July 2007, when they ensured people had access to clean drinking water and essential services and played a major part in the local community's response.

Hoveringham in Nottinghamshire is a village of 350 residents close to the River Trent and with a history of severe flooding. The residents carried out a Community Led Plan, supported by the local RCAN member, which identified how the community might take action to protect residents. An emergency plan was developed and implemented. As a result, some external investment was secured to refurbish the facilities and catering equipment in the community-owned village hall to create a temporary refuge for residents when necessary, but providing continual benefit for those who use the hall on a regular basis.

About ACRE

Action with Communities in Rural England 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. We aim 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. ACRE is nationally recognised for its expertise in ensuring rural community-led solutions are central to public policy debate.

ACRE is a member of:

- Homes & Communities Agency Rural Housing Advisory Group
- Age UK Rural Advisory Group
- Ministerial Task Force on climate change, the environment and sustainable development
- The new national rural coalition, under the chairmanship of Matthew Taylor MP, which aims to take forward his 2008 proposals to government on a Living, Working, Countryside.

RCAN Rural Community Action Network

The Rural Community Action Network comprises 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) at local level, RCC regional groupings and their national arm in ACRE, providing coverage of all rural areas throughout England. RCCs are county-based, independent, local development agencies that, for decades, have been delivering support on the ground to enable rural communities to improve quality of life for all. 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. Their strength lies in their ability to work within communities in an inclusive and holistic way, helping local people to develop local solutions and identify unmet needs through a unique approach to community-led planning. Alongside this, RCCs provide a trusted 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 National coverage, local reach

Members of the Rural Community Action Network have a long history of supporting communities to find solutions to their needs. We do this by supporting all sections of the community to plan for the future and by developing relevant services that meet the needs of all generations. We do this with a passion for social inclusion, and high standards throughout the network.

Network members

- Provide genuine reach into rural communities across England, linking national, regional and local policy with community action at the grassroots
- Promote and develop local solutions that benefit the social, environmental and economic well-being of communities
- Act as a focal point for partners across statutory, private and voluntary sectors, working together to benefit rural communities
- Tackle disadvantage by ensuring their work within rural communities reaches out to marginalised groups and encourages the development of local services for those least able to travel

ACRE details

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This document is one of a series covering the following topics, Rural Challenges, Community Led Planning, Climate Change, Rural Community Buildings, Housing, Rural Services, Transport, Sustainable Communities, Social Inclusion, Older People, Children & Young People, Healthcare and Digital Inclusion.

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