

## North East Rural Affairs Forum Members' Biographical Summaries



### **David Stewart – Chair (with effect from June 2006)**

Self employed consultant working on rural and environmental issues. Previous relevant professional experience includes as project director researching the future of farming and rural communities; chief executive of a wildlife trust and area manager for the National Trust. Relevant national experience includes serving on the England Forestry Forum, Council for National Parks, and the industry lead body for the environment and conservation. Regional experience includes serving on the environment forum, the regional advisory committee for forestry, and the board of an agricultural college. Current public service commitments include chairing the

Environment Agency's Northumbria Area stakeholder group, the NE regional fisheries, ecology, and recreation advisory committee, and adviser to the CLA regional committee.



### **Reverend Dr Dagmar Winter (Vice Chair since June 2008)**

Dagmar lives in Kirkwhelpington, Northumberland, where she is an Anglican priest for a group of rural parishes. As such she is involved at grass roots level in the life of rural communities, with the local school, village hall, farms and businesses etc. As Officer for Rural Affairs for Newcastle Diocese she is also part of regional and national church networks concerned with rural life and well-being.

Her past experience includes academic research, rural ministry abroad, hospital chaplaincy, and, during her time at Hexham Abbey, tourism and visitor welcome.

She has a particular interest in rural spirituality and in the distinct social capital churches have to offer and she is keen to examine the values which underpin rural strategies and policies.



### **David Stuart McKnight**

A results-orientated rural business professional whose technical, commercial, analytical and methodical approach to strategic and operational business development is balanced with excellent interpersonal and communication skills, a high intellect level, energy and drive.

David graduated in 1986 from Leeds University with an honours degree in agriculture and chemistry and has since worked in on-farm crop production; in food, farming, land and leisure consultancy; at a senior management level in the UK crop protection industry and latterly as a director of DLM Landmaster Ltd – a Barnard Castle-based consultancy practice specialising in land science, rural business and regeneration, where it manages the highly successful Teesdale Market Towns Initiative regeneration programme.

David also holds directorships with Teesdale Development Company Ltd and Smart IT Training Ltd.

Married to Linda and with a young son, David lives in rural North Yorkshire but with an ambition to return and live in his native North East.



### **Jason Robinson-Gay**

Jason Robinson-Gay is a furniture designer and maker running a successful furniture business at Kirkharle in Northumberland, employing people from the local economy.

After growing up in Northumberland Jason studied furniture design in Oxford before moving back to the North East to join his father in Robinson-Gay cabinet-makers.

After initially working in the outbuildings of the family home Robinson-Gay were seminal in setting up the Kirkharle group of craftspeople dedicated to the revitalisation of traditional skills in the modern environment and working in the previously redundant farm buildings at Kirkharle.

Realising the acute lack of skilled workers they began to train in house and now successfully train young people to the highest standards in this sector.

Jason is looking forward to his appointment as a member of the NERAF and relishes the challenge to be instrumental in pushing for further success in the rural economy.



### **John R Littlefair**

John Littlefair trained as an accountant, and was managing director of a successful ship chandlering and meat supply company, before taking over the farm at Hart. He has expanded it to its present 430 acres, of arable beef cattle and sheep, which he runs with the help of a part time employee. Diversification includes a livery yard, wind farm, various environmental schemes, and a training centre for disengaged young people (13-16). John was involved with the NFU at national level and now still represents them at various levels, as well as representing the industry on the Environment Agency REPAC, the Northern CBI and The Whittle Dene Catchment Steering Group (DEFRA).

He is a Local Director for the NFU Mutual Insurance Co., an Independent Director of Housing Hartlepool (a Registered Social Landlord with approx, 7200 homes), together with two other directorships. He is also a trustee of two charities, The Potting Shed North East Ltd and The Hart Village Hall Association.

Hobbies include rugby and equestrian sports.



### **Jennifer Hall**

Jennifer was born in Beadnell and now lives in Bamburgh, Northumberland.

As a manager of Berwick Citizens Advice Bureau and a Director of a local caravan site Jen has a particular interest in the conflicting demands of Housing and Tourism in rural areas.

A member of Berwick Community Development Trust and the Partnership Board of Sure Start Berwick Borough, she is keen that local developments are sustainable and meet the identified needs of local people and businesses

A keen gardener, Jen enjoys the community spirit of village life and the membership of a wide range of local groups.



### **Julia Lyford**

Director, Fourth Action. Julia runs Fourth Action, a rurally based organisation specialising in community development from an equality and diversity perspective. Current commitments include managing the North Northumberland Women's Network, and co-ordinating the Northumberland Community Development Network, where she has contributed to the development of rural community-based learning.

She has also worked for the last three years as the Advisor to the NE Equality and Diversity Forum. Originating in education both as a teacher and public sector youth worker, Julia's previous appointments have included regional roles with Age Concern and the YWCA, and she has worked as a curriculum advisor for the National Youth Agency. She has spent ten years working freelance with a focus on supporting communities through appraisals, action research and project development.

Julia is a member of the North Northumberland Leader+ Local Action Group, and of the steering groups of the Our PART and LBi projects, both seeking to involve excluded people in policy development that affects them. She has run

European projects on gender equality, and has a particular interest in developing networks as a tool for improving balanced partnership.



### **Phil Hughes**

Phil Hughes, District and Parish Councillor in Teesdale. Founder and Chairman of Teesdale Community Resources, a local development trust, and a part-time hill farmer keeping Rare Breeds and a Countryside Stewardship agreement holder. He is Chairman of sustainNE, the regional sustainable development forum, Tees and Durham Energy Advice and the Energy Saving Trust's North East Sustainable Energy Centre. A Trustee of Carbon Neutral North East and a Non Executive Board Member of n-e-life.com, the region's portal company and ADIT NE, the regional broadband aggregation body, he is also a member of Co. Durham Learning and Skills Council.

For the past 6 years Phil was a Board Member of One NorthEast where he Chaired the Regeneration Committee and was lead member for Rural Affairs, ICT and Regeneration as well as being Regional Design Champion. The Broadband Exchange Enablement project bringing high bandwidth connectivity to every rural telephone exchange in the North East was a particular personal achievement as well as the creation of a family of Design Champions in every public body in the region.

He worked for the Citizens Advice network for 16 years and prior to that was a front-line pilot in the RAF and is now engaged in Sustainable Development and Sustainable Construction and has an interest in the development of the concept of Service Design.



### **Mrs Barbara Armstrong**

Barbara has lived in a rural area all of her life, is an experienced youth worker in educational settings and is a volunteer panel member for Durham County Youth Offending Service, now the Youth Engagement Service. A current Parish Councillor and a former District Councillor, Barbara has many years experience in rural community work.



### **Miss Fiona Chesters**

Fiona's career has been embedded in the voluntary sector, with a special interest in rural areas. She has held several community development positions in various agencies, including her current post as Senior Development Officer at Tees Valley Rural Community Council.



### **Mrs Lesley Allen**

Currently Partnership Officer for the North Tyne and Redesdale Community Partnership, Lesley lives and works within a rural community. Lesley is also a member of the management committee of the Federation of Northumberland Development Trusts, and the management group of the Rural Voices Network.



**Mrs Norma Foster**

Norma is Chief Executive of The North East Regional Portal, the regional e-business development agency for the North East. Passionate about the role of e-business in the North East of England, Norma is particularly committed to ensuring that information, support and advice on online activities is fully accessible to all business and community members across the region.



**Mr Patrick Lavery**

Formerly lecturer in urban and regional planning at Birkbeck College University of London, Countryside Officer (Principal planning Officer at Tyne and Wear metropolitan County) Professor and Head of department of Tourism at University of Bournemouth, pro Vice Chancellor University of Humberside, advisor to European Commission on Education and training, and special advisor on rural matters to HRH The Prince of Wales.



**Mrs Ruth Dent**

A member of a long established dales farming family, and a lifetime resident of the countryside. Ruth has 33 years experience in the banking sector, is Chairman of the South Durham Substance Misuse Panel, a Magistrate and a School Governor. Ruth is also involved with Radio Teesdale, a new local broadcasting initiative, presenting a magazine style programme on weekday mornings.

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