

27th June 2016

## First NEFRAN Rural Business Conference

Rural businesses and key rural representatives gathered for the first NEFRAN Rural Business Conference on the 24<sup>th</sup> June at Kirkley Hall Campus.

The event was designed to promote the work of the North East Farming and Rural Affairs Network (NEFRAN) and provide information to support the growth of rural businesses.

Around 150 delegates attended to take part in a full day that offered delegates the opportunity to meet business support and funding providers, attend workshops and listen to key note speakers highlighting key issues facing the rural economy, the north east devolution deal and what had been achieved through the Pilot Rural Growth Network Programme.

Key note speaker Lord Donald Curry of Kirkharle CBE, said rural businesses had a huge part to play in supporting the regional economy and in creating more and better jobs for all. Rural businesses needed to be well supported. He referred to the opportunities of the rural economy – the strength of its diversity and the potential growth that tourism, culture and heritage businesses could generate.

Antony Braithwaite, Chair of NEFRAN who chaired the conference said, "It came over very strongly that a rural voice is needed to take part in the devolution and Brexit revolution that is about to occur. NEFRAN is ideally placed to undertake this role and influence the relevant decision makers."

The conference reflected on the Pilot North East Rural Growth Network Programme and what had been achieved and learnt. This has been used to inform new support programmes going forward. Businesses were directed to sign up to the North East Growth Hub for information on grant funding, business support, what's happening in the business community and up and coming events. [www.northeastgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.northeastgrowthhub.co.uk)

The Rural Growth Network Programme Team who currently manages the Rural Growth Network capital grant offered to be the first point of contact. For help and advice on rural business support contact one of the Rural Growth Network Implementation Officers based at Arch:-

Contact Julie Bullen on 01670 528476 ([Julie.bullen@arch-group.co.uk](mailto:Julie.bullen@arch-group.co.uk)) or Katy McIntosh on 01670 528489 [katy.mcintosh@arch-group.co.uk](mailto:katy.mcintosh@arch-group.co.uk) visit [www.archnorthumberland.co.uk/arch-business/rural-growth-network-2-1](http://www.archnorthumberland.co.uk/arch-business/rural-growth-network-2-1)

The conference was funded and supported by the North East Rural Growth Network with support from Arch and Kirkley Hall.

**ENDS**

**Media contacts:**

**North East Rural Growth Network: Alex Wiley, Marketing and Communications Manager on 01670 528495 or email [alex.wiley@arch-group.co.uk](mailto:alex.wiley@arch-group.co.uk)**

**About North East Rural Growth Network**

The rural parts of the North East LEP area play a very important role in the local economy, accounting for a significant share of total employment, providing above average levels of new business starts, and contributing disproportionately to the region's visitor economy. They also offer future growth opportunities through key rural sectors (including knowledge intensive business services, tourism, food and drink, energy, and environmental services), and the economic potential of rural towns.

Following the Government's Rural Economy Growth Review in 2011, the North East Rural Growth Network (NERGN) was formed as part of a pilot national programme to stimulate economic growth in rural businesses and communities.

As a result of the success of the Pilot North East Rural Growth Network (NERGN) growth programme, a new programme of business support has been developed to strengthen the North East Local Enterprise Partnership rural economy over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20. The overall programme has secured £6million Local Growth Funding through the North East Growth Deal to deliver a range of interventions to boost rural economic growth in the NELEP area.

The North East Rural Growth Network (NERGN) covers the rural areas of Northumberland, Durham and Gateshead.

The programme is supported by Northumberland County Council as the accountable body and delivered by Arch – The Northumberland Development Company, on behalf of Northumberland County Council. The NERGN is governed by stakeholders representing Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Northumberland County Council, Northumberland National Park Authority, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Country Land and Business Association, the National Farmers Union, the North East Enterprise Agency Ltd, the region's Leader Local Action Groups, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Northumberland Tourism, Visit Durham, Newcastle University and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the North East Equalities Coalition.