BRIEFING NOTE

Veterans framework

Introduction and background

1. The issue of labour availability for rural businesses is one of increasing concern for members. Increased immigration controls following Brexit has meant a sizeable reduction in the availability of migrant labour with the CLA stressing to government the need to adopt a more flexible immigration policy, particularly regarding employment. This is exacerbated by a lack of domestic workers filling the void. Despite rural businesses offering higher wage levels there appears to be a lack of willingness from domestic workers to work in the rural economy. There remains an unwillingness to work in certain sectors, such as agriculture, a lack of skills and the unavailability of housing as well as a suitable infrastructure. When these come together, the labour pool begins to shrink.

2. Nevertheless, there are other potential labour pools where living and working in a rural environment is seen as conducive. One such grouping is ex-military or veterans and there is evidence that veterans appear more willing to work in the rural economy.

3. Recognising that veterans can become an integral part of the rural workforce, a small CLA staff working group (see Annex 2 below) has been developing a project to increase our contacts with veteran support groups, put in place co-ordinated activity nationally, and provide and disseminate more targeted information to the CLA membership. In addition, we have been exploring the potential of signing the Armed Forces Covenant that will provide a platform for the project. It has now been agreed that the CLA should sign the covenant and it is now a question of how this is implemented.

4. This paper provides a framework of delivering a targeted communications plan, developing more contact with veteran support groups and ensure that CLA members increase their awareness of the veteran community.

The Armed Forces Covenant

5. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that members of the armed forces will be treated fairly, whether they are currently serving personnel or have left. It states the businesses that sign the Covenant make a range of written and publicised pledges, for example, providing employment for those leaving the military. The level of support depend on the size and nature of the organisation and will include policies that support employment of veterans and service spouses/partners and services. To date, more than 800 businesses and charities have signed the Covenant and it must be signed by a person in authority who can ensure that commitments are implemented and maintained.

6. The CLA has recognised the importance of veterans as an available labour pool. This means the need for better linkages between veterans and employers with the CLA acting as a co-ordinator between the two. We can build on this by establishing better contacts with national and regional support networks. There is already a high level of enthusiasm for the CLA to take a pro-active role. Many of the local support groups are small and fragmented and by co-ordinating activity within a framework of common goals the CLA's standing and credibility in this area should increase. We will be able to show members how we are developing ways to make it easier to find labour as well as being in a better position to support the veterans community.

7. The Covenant includes the Employer Recognition Scheme which acknowledges employers who provide support to the armed forces by implementing an employer's stated pledges. It is a three-tier approach – bronze, silver and gold – with each relating to the different levels of commitment provided by employers. Upon signing the Covenant, the business automatically receives the bronze award. Silver and gold are awarded when certain criteria are met.

Pledges

8. The pledges the CLA will commit to under the AFC are to:
   - Encourage CLA members, as employers, to consider employing veterans of the Armed Forces;
   - Disseminate information to CLA members that increases knowledge and leads to a more inclusive relationship with the military community;
   - Link up with existing national and regional networks that currently support veterans to improve the mental and physical well-being of veterans after they leave the armed forces.

9. In order to meet these pledges, we will need effective co-ordination nationally as well as enhancing contacts and networks at regional level. Once the right structures are in place with the Armed Forces Covenant as the platform, we will be able to both inform and support our membership by developing vital relationships with the armed forces and the veterans community.

Liaison with veteran support groups and government

10. We have already identified a number of veteran support groups across England and Wales. In discussions with these groups it is clear they are invaluable in providing liaison with those leaving the armed forces. However, they are small and fragmented.

11. Nevertheless, ongoing contacts with these contacts will be important in extending our own discussions with the armed forces and increasing their awareness of the rural economy, particularly regarding labour supply.

12. Conversely, government policy tends to be disjointed. Training for those leaving the armed forces is undertaken by the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) under the Ministry of Defence. There are no training courses offered by CTP in rural economic sectors, such as forestry and woodland, and there appears to be an unwillingness to understand the importance of rural employers. This needs to be rectified through lobbying the Ministry of Defence.

13. This will meet pledge 3.

Veterans' "Champions"

14. It is important to use our resources as efficiently as possible. In conversations with a number of members who are ex-military, there is a willingness to become “veteran champions” and act as liaison points in disseminating information and best practice. This has the advantage of utilising our member base and the experience of our members who were in the armed forces.

15. We aim to contacting CLA branch committees, through the regions, for members who are willing to act as champions. These will then discuss how best to engage and communicate with CLA members as employers in order to meet pledges 1 and 2. Once in place, this will create a champions network that can support the CLA’s policy objectives.

Information provision and raising awareness with CLA members as employers

16. A key aim of the veterans project is to increase information provision on the importance of the veterans labour pool and to raise awareness of the employment opportunities on offer. It is important that we are able to identify from CLA employers the skills they need. We also need to raise awareness amongst employers of other career opportunities, such as apprenticeships, long term career opportunities, career advancement, training, and benefits.

17. In order to meet pledges 1 and 2 we will need to produce a series of briefing and guidance notes that will be available on the CLA website and to promote these through the magazine and other communication mechanisms.

Utilising Veterans’ skills

18. The project also allows the CLA to raise awareness of the skills veterans already possess that would help employers. Employing veterans could help fill the skills gap in the rural economy.

19. We are fully aware that are issues relating to skills provision in the rural economy and veterans already embrace technological developments that would be of direct benefit to CLA employers.

20. This will meet pledge 1.

Communication

21. The veterans project provides the CLA with a number of opportunities to increase awareness amongst the membership of the importance of the veterans community. To make this work will require targeted communications that are able to disseminate and inform. From a public relations perspective, it presents the CLA with the opportunity of promoting our work to a wider audience, meet the pledges under the Armed Forces Covenant and showcase the importance and potential of the rural economy. It should add both social and economic value in rural areas.

22. We will aim to:
    - Produce a series of articles for the CLA magazine over a 12 month period;
    - Update members through regular blog posts through national and regional E-News;
    - Hold a formal signing event of the Armed Forces Covenant, potentially at a South West event and a supplementary event at the Royal Welsh Show;

- Provide an information pack for CLA members, as employers, and for those coming out of the armed forces on how to locate and employ veterans and for veterans to gain understanding of the role and needs of the rural economy.

23. This will meet pledges 1 and 2. An action plan is set out below at Annex 1.

Annex 1: Action plan and delivery

Area/Issue	Objective	Activity	Timeline/delivery
Armed Forces Covenant	To provide a focused platform for the veterans project	Formal signing of the covenant To take place at a designated SW show Supplementary signing at the Royal Welsh Show (tbc)	SW event: June 2023 Royal Welsh: July 2023 (tbc)
Veterans support groups	To meet the requirements of pledge 3	Regions to continue to link up with identified support groups. This should, over time, begin to create a regional/national network	Ongoing. Regional contacts to develop a timetable for identifying and meeting support groups as well as setting out the objectives of the project.
Veterans' Champions	To put in place a series of regional/local champions (CLA members) willing to act as liaison points with CLA members. To meet pledges 1 & 2	Discuss and identify through regions members willing to act as champions. Once in place, this will act as one of the main mechanisms in liaising with CLA members	Ideally, this needs to be in place within 3 to 6 months. With this in place it will be possible for the regions to ensure effective liaison with the membership.
Skills development	To understand the skills requirements of employers and to make the link with veterans' employment needs. To meet the requirements of pledge 1.	Develop through CLA skills policy and framework. This will need to lobby government to ensure there is an awareness of the importance of skills for rural businesses and how these need to be enhanced.	Over the next 12 months initially. Skills development for veterans will be a key part of an overall CLA skills and labour policy to lobby government. This will also focus on certain rural economic sectors, such as forestry and woodlands
Member information and awareness	To disseminate sufficient information to members that increases awareness of the veterans community. To meet the requirements of pledge 2.	Information on veterans (the type of employment wanted, the skills and experience on offer) will be relayed to members. This will be through direct communication through the CLA magazine as well as briefing and guidance notes.	To be delivered in stages over a 12/18 month period: (a) 5/6 articles for magazine over 12 months (b) Blogs for E-News (c) Information pack for CLA members and veterans

Annex 2: Internal working group

Charles Trotman:	London (chair and national)
Andrew Marriott:	East
Sarah Fern:	South West
Chris Farr:	South West
John Greenshields:	Midlands
Charles de Winton:	Wales
Kate Bankier:	North
To be appointed:	South East