

PRESS RELEASE

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LOCAL TV IS MORE THAN BBC NEWS

The BBC's West Midlands local TV pilot is not the only way forward, concluded panellists at this week's Borderlines Film Festival forum in Hereford.

James Coghill, editor of BBC Hereford and Worcester's local TV service, explained that the experiment was still evolving, and revealed that his personal view is that the currently available broadband access route offered a better platform than the alternative satellite version.

"Our audience want and like news," claimed Coghill, but most of the delegates - drawn from all over the county - did not share this view.

Chair Nic Millington, chief executive of The Rural Media Company, was inundated with calls from the floor to promote a far greater variety of local TV material than the current daily use by the BBC of a single 90 second film from the two counties.

The broadcaster has sub-contracted the provision of community films from Herefordshire to The Rural Media Company, which has long experience of working with groups and individuals in the county. The charity is deploying media professionals to help amateur filmmakers produce two 90 second films for the service each week.

The Rural Media Company staged a well-attended forum within the annual Borderlines festival on Tuesday 28 March to examine and debate progress so far on the BBC pilot – which will vitally affect the future rollout of local TV throughout the nation.

BBC West Midlands is offering a news driven service for nine months - which some described as "local radio with pictures" - but many participants and grass roots filmmakers indicated that such a matrix is far too constricting.

Phil Shepherd, chair of the Community Media Association, pressed delegates to lobby their MPs to advance a variety of Local TV models through Ofcom. Roger Drury of Forest of Dean Radio – with Britain's first five-year community radio licence recently under his belt – advocated a

democratisation of the airwaves arguing that the BBC doesn't know best at grass roots levels. Nic Millington stressed that if the BBC is to lead on the rollout of local TV in the UK in the future, it will be critical that genuine partnerships are formed and maintained with independent and community media organisations.

The BBC pilot began screening in December 2005, available via the BBC website, or through the red button on satellite. Each day a one hour service is delivered, repeated hourly. This consists of six ten-minute sub-region or county segments. In parallel the news and feature stories can be accessed via the website, and feature stories are available in an accessible archive.

The big message from the conference floor was that community issues should not be determinedly packaged into 90 second self-contained films slipped into the end of a news bulletin.

Release Ends

Note to Editors

- The Rural Media Company works throughout the UK. We combine community and informal education, training and advocacy with the professional skills of the media industry. The results are effective, high-impact, high-quality media projects and educational materials at the cutting edge of current policy and debate. The Rural Media Company is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee (www.ruralmedia.co.uk).
- The Rural Media Company receives support from the UK Film Council, Screen West Midlands, Herefordshire Council and many other funders, trusts, foundations and charities.

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