



Environment Action Group 7th October 2015

14:00 – 16:00

Joan Elliot Meeting Room, Abbots Hall Farm, Gt Wigborough (Essex Wildlife Trust)

Present

Cannon John Brown	Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)	JB
Suzanne Harris	Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)	SH
Dave Hedges	RSPB	DH
Paul Hinsley	Essex County Council	PH
Mark Iley	Essex Biodiversity Project	MI
John Meehan	ECC Environment Team	JM
Tricia Moxey	CPREssex	TM
Mike Neale	Environment Agency	MN
Revd Janet Nicholls	CofE	JN
Lizzie Rose	Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)	LR
Adam Scott	NFU	AS
Michael Talbot	Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC)	MT

1) Welcome and Apologies

Apologies had been received from:

Lindsey Allen

Rosemary Padfield

Archdeacon Robin King

George Courtauld

Kris Radley

2) Introduction – John Brown

The natural environment should receive a significant input into the new strategy.

Today we need a discussion on what we would like to be included in this new strategy.

Please refer to the public questionnaire at the end are the environmental questions and please complete. It would be failure to not take the natural environment seriously.

PH - How can housing affect... funding and transport? We should include the environment and not silo it.

AS – Is it a rewrite??

PH - Yes it is. The existing strategy is no longer in line with current funding and partner bodies. New proposals need to be justified.

3) Environmental Themes in current documents

South East LEP –

JM – SELEP are proving hard to work with regards to the environment, cancelling meetings etc.

Peter Jones does not seem overly sympathetic to environmental issues.

SH – Peter Jones is no longer the chairman; vice Chairman is currently acting Chair.

DH – Federalisation – how the South East LEP isn't working looking at prioritise spending.

Federalisation to smaller groups is on hold due to George Osbourne's devolution announcement.

DH – Difficult to promote Environment with the LEP. RSPB is not recognised. Cultural challenge for the RSPB. It needs to be integrated with other areas as there is no platform created with the LEP. We could add to housing etc.

SH –LEP has tight targets to meet

Essex Rivers LAG – Leader funding in mid-Essex will launch on 14th October 2015

4) Current Focus

- Sustainable economic growth

There is a real focus on the rural economy which is required and also a need to sustain populations etc

What is the effect on the environment?

JM - Since 2008 – ECC have been driven by economic growth and so has the LEP and other government organisations.

DH – can we find ways in investment and business whilst nature continues to thrive, taking into account climate change such as sea level rise etc. We all work but as a community we need to work alongside the environment. Things will become less viable.

MI –WATER is a key issue- the Wildlife Trust are looking into water quality and quantity; people, economy, and the environment are all linked. It is a key issue for all as without water there is no economy. Water is a key feature for the strategy. The LEP will understand this as they will care about water.

JM – water is a form of energy - with a rising population it is required.

MI – What is required is more water and better quality for a longer period.

MN – Areas of outstanding beauty all based around water.

AS – Food is also a major factor for this area and we are being asked to produce more food on less water. Ref (Foresight Report – John Beddington 2009)

TM – need to be more self-sufficient in food this is fundamental.

MT – A good strategy and very well prepared – The Millennium survey conducted in St Oysth questioned how many residents were born in the village it showed 9% from the respondees. People moving into rural areas want it changed for convenience and are mainly relocating from cities. Properties being bought by city folk but they are in denial to the rural ethos, not all are like minded.

DH –Access to wild green space is essential not man made; there is huge amount of peoples wellbeing and increased productivity sustainability element to that. Urban areas green space surveys Natural England metric test check the green space availability.

MI - ANGST report Wildlife Trust research done to do with access to natural green space and which benefits work ethos and peoples wellbeing.

Transforming industrial sore sights and changing into green spaces in cities.

PH – There is a lot evidence re health benefits. Essex Rural Strategy how does it tie in? How do we manage it?

- MI** – Access to green space for locals is important some rural areas are more impoverished than urban. Access appears to be higher for urban visitors than if you actually live in a rural area.
- JM** - Sustainable Economic growth –Example: 2 projects --Thames Estuary Path & Ebbsfleet Village, Kent.
Natural England are planning a 250 mile path from Suffolk to London. This will be beneficial to local economies projects can be talked about to help economic growth.
Harwich access route to Essex instead of Suffolk.
- DH** – National Planning Award, paid for itself in year one, in profit sector in year two (A project success in Wales).
- PH** - Uttlesford: Footpaths are needed. Pretty place to visit but would question the access to the countryside.
- AS** - A footpath is just as good as a public park to use with the same fresh air scenery etc. Parks aren't the whole answer.
- DH** - Provide access to the public sector this needs to be improved.
Essex University have investigated the access to the country for the health benefits. Prove the results are positive.
Natural wild look
- AS** – In Essex 70% Agricultural rural
- JM** – Thames Estuary path very pretty some people like being contained and others to walk freely.
- JM** – Wallasea and Thurrock 1st year 100,000 visitors Wallasea looks like it will go the same way.
The ability of vision in Essex is to absorb the public without destroying the area that they enter.
- JN** - Farm diversification projects farm shops cafes offering apprenticeships for the trade on their doorstep. Encouraging diversification.
Suffolk Food Charter – Jimmy's Farm an example.
Coastal paths - opening up opportunities.
- TM** – Brentwood grow a lot of the food but still have to import certain items, restaurants also publicise locally sourced. But is considered niche.
Industrial types are OSR farmers, wheat, etc.
Need a reason for people to visit, the landscape particularly around the coast to attract visitors. Holiday parks encourage visitors by providing activities.
For example boat trips on the North Norfolk coast seal watching. This assists protecting and enhancing the environmental features by telling a story to encourage people to return and word of mouth.
- TM** – Visit Essex are proactive with tourism in mind, West Essex is an interesting place to visit there is more to be done re wildlife watching.
- JM** – The Timescale for Essex coastal path is 3 – 5 years for completion.
- SH** – Conscious of communities saying we need this, the environment sector is not discussing the protection on the landscape.
- TM** - Habitat enhancement impacts on wildlife needs just to be aware.
- JN** - Educational aspect required to protect the environment.
- DH** - Dialogue and collaboration required:
The RSPB work with yacht groups and parish councils discussing consultations.

Cultural move in consultation far more open to access and understanding otherwise people will have no interest.

MI – Wildlife resource mostly threatened by development which is constantly under pressure -
ACTION facts figures from Mark -LR

DH – Current planning on brownfield (bf) sites technically try to avoid green belt, Essex has got a strong portfolio of BF sites. These sites still provide habitats for wildlife.

When and where we choose to build the houses wildlife is affected such as swallows and swifts which are declining. Front gardens no longer included and replaced by cement driveways instead.

Need to provide alternatives for wildlife integrate into the design stage not just nail a bird box on the side of the house. Engage with the developers at the planning stage.

Be that company for being known as green.

PH -Essex Guide is in place for this.

SH – Need to consolidate a theory of what we want to see first ... then add the 'how'.

MI – Local authorities do not understand how to improve the affordable housing which includes the drainage systems. Need better understanding of SUDS for parishes etc
Developers only put the bare minimum in.

TM – Better health benefits for the people who move to the countryside. Save where you can.

DH - Vision – wildlife and nature where possible in all developments.

Low Carbon funding – LEP get funding from EU - solar farms, anaerobic digesters and wind farms – controversial but they are growing.

MI – Woodland energy development. Need to support wood fuel create wildlife habitats and also energy for people.

MI -Strategy should build on woodland development.

DH - Use roofs before land for solar panels and also habitats.

DH – Nuclear Power Station: RSPB are not pro as there is no solution for the waste, whilst the technology is available to use renewables

MI – Build a nuclear reactor that is quality and does not raise the water temp and oppose a cheap one.

- Innovative projects
- Collaboration to attract visitors and customers
- Access to rural green space
- Affordable housing
- Transport link

DH – Is it a refresh of the documents?

SH - All original six will be replaced and discussions are taking place to decide what with.

DH - Fundamentals in the introduction - Essex is abundant with wildlife

The State nature report shows – 1000s of species mammals and birds etc

The story isn't what this doc implies needs to have a fundamental principle

What's the impact to the environment need to look at the state of the environment and what is actually happening?

PH – Let LR/SH/MR know the key areas fact and figures ask DH so we have the actual facts -
ACTION

MI – Wildlife trust are collating information - ask MI for this information. Our environment is actually impoverished compared to what people think.

SH – Statistics show that Essex is not a very rural county but we know different; we have something of value and we will work to protect it.

AS – Continually looking at bleak is negative need to keep the balance to keep peoples interest.

JM – Right to say Essex is rural and attract not just local people but others to visit Essex.

JB - Understanding of what sustainability is? Who should the conversation be between? County or individual district.

TM – Nothing can operate in isolation; think beyond boundaries, impacted on what is happening to the climate.

DH – Hook for people to access funding through the LEP etc. The aim is to make sure we are doing the right thing. What are we measuring success by??

Reality is developers etc applying for this money hopefully they will be steered in the right direction through this strategy.

SH – It is a strategic document it doesn't have measures and outcomes.

To represent the county of what we want to see and also it's a lobbying and funding support influencing tool. Statistics are being reviewed by Essex County Council - Marcus Roberts.

We need to make sure the statistics are used to make sure the right things will happen, and use the statistics to push forward where possible.

TM - Look to sponsor greener businesses

DH – Developer to mitigate the responsibility of the impact on the environment not to leave to tax payers.

MT – Not the whole area should be left to the Local Authority to undertake.

Strategic terms how can we incorporate these

SH – Email Suzanne with 5 priorities with environment that the strategy should be saying:

- 1) Water – want do you want us to say
- 2) Food production – what are we supporting
- 3) Foot paths and access – clarity
- 4) Housing and location with acceptance that housing will happen but where and how strategic view
- 5) How can it be more environmentally friendly
- 6) Education – how do we educate??
- 7) Supporting or opposing any type of energy creation
- 8) New nuclear power station if it good then please give us some pointers on how it can be good
- 9) Climate Change – your view

7) AOB

8) Date of next meeting TBC