



STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the Meeting held on

Thursday 15th March 2007 9.30 a.m.

County Hall Chelmsford

Attendees: -

John Brown -(ERP Vice-Chair)	JB	
Peter Baggott – EALC	PB	Environment Action Group
John Hall – Essex Wildlife Trust	JH	Environment Action Group
Suzanne Roast – RCCE	SR	Community Action Group
Dianne Hardy – Exdra	DH	Economic Action Group
Terry Taber – FSB	TT	Economic Action Group
Chris Allen – EEDA	CA	
Keith Blackburn – Essex County Council	KB	
Joy Sheppard (EALC),	JS	
Kirsty Monk– RCCE – Minutes	KM	
Wendy Scattergood – ELGA	WS	

Apologies: -,

Terry Cutmore	TC
Peter Martin – ERP Chair,	PM
Ed Gregory- ECC	EG
Mick Page – EERF	MP
Charles Braithwaite – EERF	CB
Richard Woolley – EERF	RW
Nick Shuttleworth – RCCE	NS
Gemma Driscoll ECC	GD
Sandy Cruickshank (Go East)	SC
Peter Chillingworth	PC

The Chairman John Brown (JB)- RCCE, welcomed everyone to the meeting and general introductions were made.

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting Held on 31st January 2007

Matters of accuracy: Peter Chillingworth and not Peter Baggott had asked the question on item 7.

The meeting attendees then approved the minutes.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting held on 31st January 2007

None

3. **Report from the East of England Rural Forum (EERF)**

John Hall

JH reported that the forum had covered the 4 main sub groups:

Housing Group
Market Towns Group
Business Support
Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy Group

The provision of health services in rural areas by PCT's will be an important agenda item at the next ministerial meeting.

EERF Chairman

After 3 years the Chairman of the East of England Rural Forum, Richard Powell is to stand down and a new Chairperson is to be elected at the next AGM; no reason for his resignation has been given.

EERF Soapbox Items

JH explained that at each EERF meeting there was now a soapbox item included as an agenda item.

JB asked if the soapbox items were effective and generated actions and responses.

JH felt that they were useful. He gave an example of a soapbox item raised at a previous meeting regarding environmental stewardship. This highlighted the benefits of the scheme, which benefits and provides environmental support for farmers, however the entry level and higher-level grants have proved difficult to administer due to mapping issues. This is meant in real terms that the schemes grants have been delayed by 12 months and caused a lack of confidence in the scheme by Land Owners and Farmers.

This Soapbox item had brought about a letter to Ministers identifying the lack of funding and lack of confidence in the scheme and thereby gave the response from the East of England (other Regions had also raised similar concerns).

SOAP BOX Item to be taken to the EERF -Pilot Scheme Funding.

KB asked that JH take forward a soapbox item on behalf of the ERP Steering Group regarding Pilot Schemes. KB felt that even effective pilot schemes often failed to result in a substantive scheme as once the initial funding had finished, no further funding or alternative were available to continue the projects.

JS said that RCCE and EALC were both subject to short term funding, which meant that one could never be sure as to whether it would be possible to retain staff; this made long term planning very difficult and that staff had little job security.

SR added that it was likely that no news on future funding from the RCSP or its successor would be heard until at least autumn, if not later.

JH felt that this was a common problem with dependency on grant funding, but it was also necessary to build sustainability into the projects planning and objectives and this should be built into the project application from the start.

CA thought it important to give a balanced view and that not all pilot schemes worked.

KB said that he was only talking about successful pilot schemes.

DH felt that from the liC perspective as well as EEDA's that they would not fund unsustainable projects. She went on to question where the funding for rural communities to help get that sustainability for capacity building was to be found.

SR explained that the RSCP had replaced core funding – it is not a grant as such but it is a case of money for the County to achieve the County's priorities.

Action:

JB asked that KB, RW and JH liase with each other on the Soapbox item.

4. Reports from the Action Groups.

• **Community Action Group (CAG)**

Suzanne Roast

The CAG group had prioritised their tasks on the action plan and was tackling the most urgent first.

They had also looked at tasks on the action plan that were currently being met by up and running projects (such as the Linking Communities Scheme), but that would shortly (March 2008) be without funding and therefore identified the need to secure future funding to ensure that the task on the action plan continued to be met.

Procurement and the Voluntary Sector.

A new task that should be added to the action plan had been identified and that was to enable the support and training of the voluntary sector to meet the demands of the new climate of "procurement" being enforced from above.

DH agreed that this was an important issue and that liC were already reviewing this problem.

Action: DH and SR to liase to further the action on the procurement issue.

Lottery Funding and the Olympics

SR mentioned that the CAG had highlighted the problems which will face the Voluntary Sector following the announcement that the projected Olympic overspend will be met by Lottery funding.

A general discussion was held by the group, which discussed the pros and cons of the situation. It was felt that the Olympics would enable economic regeneration and growth for the region, but that there would be an impact on the voluntary sector. Therefore a balanced view must be maintained and further consultation taken.

Partnerships for Market Towns

SR reported to the group that herself, Keith Blackburn and Sally Williams (Action for Market Towns) had met and discussed ways of promoting this in the County, as other regions had much higher take up of the scheme. A new pamphlet was to be produced by Sally and an event hosted by RCCE/EEDA to promote the partnerships was to be held later on this year.

TT asked that the business community in Essex be informed of this event and that he could email members of his organisation if SR could let him know the post codes that she was interested in.

JS said that it would be interesting to see how many parish Councils considered themselves to be Market Towns and suggested that perhaps Suzanne could come and speak to them regarding partnerships.

Action: SR to report to the next meeting on further progress on this issue and liaise with TT regarding post codes for advertising the event to the business community.

Action: SR to speak to JS regarding spreading the word via Parish Councils.

Economic Action Group

Keith Blackburn

KB advised the group that the next meeting of the Regional Rural Forum would be held on 21/03/07 and funding would be one of the items addressed.

The EacG had looked at the following issues:

- Concern about excess signage in rural areas
- Issue of Migrant Workers
- Sustainable construction techniques – early adoption for small business giving them economic advantages.

SR mentioned that Stewart Burgess would be visiting RCCE and that she would be taking him on a tour of Essex to highlight issues facing rural communities.

Environment Action Group

Peter Baggott

PB reported to the group that the main items identified to be taken forward to the next meeting on 04/04/07 were as follows:

- Essex Rural Strategy
- Biodiversity Action
- Climate Change
- Stock take of Activities and Working Items in relation to the Local Area Agreement (LAA)
- Road Development in the Chelmer Valley.

DH said that the LAA priority 12 agreements are being revised to include a bigger role for the environment.

PB replied that he was going to raise this at the next meeting but was not sure who should be involved.

KB felt that this issue should be driven by the ERP.

DH believed that there was to be a fundamental change in the LAA's and that perhaps someone from the ERP needs to talk to ECC and asked who the best person to talk to would be.

KB felt that Richard Hodderson should be the first port of call.

PB advised that Kevin Jones linked in also and that the group needed to take this issue into their orbit.

TT said that if the LAA's were set for a dramatic change it was necessary to be informed so that planning could be steered towards the right areas.

DH stated that a Refresh of the LAA's had been carried out earlier this year which had reduced down the number of targets; this will determine funding and policies and we need to get representatives from the groups involved.

Action

SR to follow up.

5. Essex Rural Strategy Action Plan Review

Suzanne Roast

SR explained (as she had mentioned previously) that the CAG had refreshed the order of priorities of the Action Plan

PB felt that the Action Plan would be affected by the change in the LAA's.

KB said that the strategy document predated the LAA.

JB was concerned that the Essex Rural Partnership would lose the environmental component of its remit.

Actions Arising:

- To issue an update to the ERP by 16/05/07.

6. Mainstreaming Rural

Keith Blackburn

KB asked that this issue be raised instead at the next SG Meeting as Mick Page had been unfortunately been unwell and no new progress had been made on this issue.

Action: KB to report to the next meeting any updates on this issue.

7. Farming Seminar

Keith Blackburn

KB advised the meeting farming seminar on 15/03/07 was taking place at Abyss Roding from lunch time to 5.30 pm.

The co sponsors were the National Farmers Union and topics such as Climate Change, Bio fuels and Bio Mass were to be discussed.

Action: KB to circulate Agenda and Event details and send to KM for circulation.

8. RSCP Update

Suzanne Roast/Joy Sheppard

SR advised that at the end of the first financial year of the RCSP projects that all are running to target and budget.

Quick measures had been taken to ensure that the Community Planning would not have to return any of its grant back to Defra.

JS advised that work to aid the Local Elections was going well and that their team had worked hard to encourage local people to stand for election. This is also the first year that 18 year olds have been allowed to stand for election.

JS also said that the County had the largest number of Quality Councils in the Country (34) and that the Youth council Project had identified a need to make a youth council handbook available.

JS advised that there was a bill at committee stage that would enable District and Borough Councils to create Parishes.

WS told the meeting that their Council had funded 50% of the election costs to encourage local elections to be held.

JS and SR were both concerned that there was no sign as to where or when the money will come from to cover the match funding promised when the RSCP is replaced.

10. **LiC Update**

Suzanne Roast / Dianne Hardy

DH explained that the LiC had 3 core priorities:

- Employment
- Enterprise
- Skills
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It was not a strand of funding specifically for rural issues but that LiC could fit in rural issues into that indices of multiple deprivation used to set the funding criteria.

SR and DH have sought to fit these criteria when submitting projects in the business plan to specifically target people in rural areas.

Rural Retail Advisor Post

Regarding the Rural Retail Advisor Post submitted, in LiC terminology rural shop keepers do not fulfil the deprived criteria. We had to argue that this was an innovative way to help the wider (deprived) rural community by helping the rural shop keeper and the post's remit has been revised to help it fit the funding criteria.

WS felt that helping people reopen closed shops would be of more crucial to rural areas.

DH replied that LiC could not fund start up costs.

Remote Access Points

There was a general discussion regarding the proposed pilot scheme project in Maldon which was to be set up to enable the local rural community to access information via the internet.

WS said that they had funded a pilot of an internet access scheme in Braintree successfully.

JS felt that Parish Council Offices might also be a good site for one stop shops with internet access

SR said that Thurrock has a mobile IT skills training bus and this could be used to Move around the County to provide training and IT access.

Action:

SR to give update on whether EEDA have approved funding for the revised Maldon scheme.

Action:

Steering Group to monitor the success of similar County remote access schemes and to find out about the possibility of using the IT skills bus Countywide.

11. Nomination of EERF Representative.

SR explained that John Hall had successfully represented the ERP on the EERF for the last 2 years and asked that the group re elect him to continue as the ERP representative.

All those present gave their thanks for JH's work to date and asked that he remain as ERP representative on the EERF.

John Hall agreed to carry on his role as requested.

JB wished to thank John for the fantastic job he had done in the last 2 years in representing the ERP views and feeding back to the Steering Group and Full Membership respectively.

12. Rural Post Offices

SR advised the SG that the response to the DTI consultation document had been received and acknowledged in good time. The findings would probably not be now until after the May Local Elections.

SR explained that a meeting of an ERP sub group had been convened, to look at ways of finding solutions to the closure of post offices in rural areas and access issues to those that remain; given that the "access criteria" set out in the white paper does not take into account rural access issues.

Action: SR to feedback to the SG at the next meeting.

13. Date of Next SG Meeting:

Date of the next ERP full membership and then Steering group meeting 16/05/07, Cressing Temple barns, Nr Braintree, 9.30am coffee/teas for 10.00am start, full ERP with lunch to follow. Immediately followed by the meeting of the Steering Group commencing 2.00pm.

Further Diary Dates:

Date of the Farmers Seminar: 15/05/07

SR circulated details of an event on Coastal regeneration to the Group 22/03/07 The Columbine Centre, Walton on the Naze.

14. A.O.B

ERP Promotional Material and Website

SR advised the group that a web site and promotional items were being devised for the ERP. She said that due to the many colours in the ERP logo it was adding additional printing costs to the promotional items and asked the groups permission to use only 1 blue instead of the 2 in the logo to reduce these costs.

The Group agreed.

Rural Proofing Toolkit

DH also reported that the Rural Proofing Toolkit had been drawn up and it was generally felt to be a useful document. It was aimed at helping rural areas overcoming barriers to access.

Meeting closed at 11.40 am.