

**South East Rural Board
Government Offices, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford
Friday 19th June 2009: 11.00 – 14.00**

Minutes of Meeting

Attendees:

Paul Bettison – Chairman

Board Members

Alan Betts – representing Forestry Commission

Andrew Bowles – representing the Rural Forum for the South East

Harvey Bradshaw – Environment Agency

Geoff Butler – representing business

Chris Corrigan – representing environment RSPB

Mike Daly – representing the Health Authorities

Raymond Ellis – representing County Councils

Alan Law – Natural England

Shaun Leavey – Sustainable Food and Farming

Jeremy Leggett – Rural Community Council Network

Oona Muirhead – (on behalf of Keith Mitchell) - SEEDA

Working Group Members:

Valerie Carter - SEEDA

Hannah Bussey (representing Julie Price - also GOSE Observer on the Board)

Chris Edwards- Natural England

Jacinta Thorley – South East Rural Community Councils

Apologies:

Pam Doodles – representing District Councils

Keith Mitchell – SEEDA (but represented by Oona Muirhead)

Andy Brown – English Heritage

Gill Cameron- Waller – Wealden District Council

Item 1: Welcome and introduction and minutes of last meeting

Paul Bettison welcomed all to the Board meeting and briefly went through the minutes of the last meeting 21st April 2009. Matters arising are included in the discussions under later Items.

Item 2: Report on the work of the Rural Forum

Andrew Bowles – the Chairman of the Rural Forum South East – reported on their last meeting held on 10 June 2009 at Farnham Castle - (set out in Box below)

Notes from Rural Forum

Board Priorities

It was agreed that Board and Forum have a lot to offer by way of their knowledge on what's going on in Rural Areas.

Comments made by the Forum:

- The Forum agreed the Board priorities and will work to support their delivery.
- It is critical that the Board and Forum work together to get the evidence of Rural need and Rural added value right.
- We need to get a better measure on the added value of the Board and Forum – and how do we monitor this?
- The Forum need a better understanding as to what the Board's 'Healthy Living priority is, before the next meeting.
- Broadband priority needs to ensure that the work already undertaken by CLA & the Carter review is not missed. I already have offers of assistance from 3 members of SE Rural Forum plus Chief Executive of Kent County Council in progressing this.
- The work of the Matthew Taylor review needs to be considered within the Affordable Home priority (note, the previous incarnation of the Forum responded to the review).
- The Board and Forum must make sure that both sides of the story are told, eg what the rural offer is, but not at the sacrifice of the indigenous rural population.
- It is important that the input from VCS (voluntary & community sector)/ Third Sector in mainstreaming the rural agenda is recognised, specific examples include the work of the third sector in mental health & young people.
- Economic downturn has had a huge impact on third sector delivery and services are disappearing due to funding cuts and bankruptcy.
- Forum members reiterated the importance of encouraging a breadth of representative from LSPs, not just Councillors but hopefully Health and Police sectors etc.
- Part of the role of the Board/Forum was to commission public services to rural proof their policies and delivery.
- There was a mixed response in the engagement of the PCT (Kent have a good relationship). PCT representation on the Board will help better engagement, but generally comments were that the health agenda was too target focused and potentially say Rural as an 'add on' – not as mainstreamed delivery.
- There was a bigger policy question raised on getting the services to people or people to the services.
- The Board need to give clear messages to senior decision makers in the region before provision of services for rural communities' declines.
- The Board need to be clearer that transport is a priority for the Board, but is cross cutting agenda and therefore does not have a specific priority working group allocated to it (SEEDA have agreed to make this more transparent). General forum comments on the need to get transport for rural areas right, be innovative in solutions and be aware of the carbon footprint of existing and potential solutions.

- A wider philosophy needs to be adopted where rural is discussed it needs to embrace the working and living together motto.
- The Forum are interested in the work of the CRC looking into rural having a link into climate mitigation – carbon reduction, sites of renewable energy, flood plains etc.
- Looked at local experience of Rural being addressed by LAAs and LSPs. Generally reported that it was poor. No incentive to rural proof.
- It was suggested that Paul Bettison/Andrew Bowles invite every LSP and ask if they have 'Rural' covered in their LSP and if not why not!
- Issue of national indicator set targets not being a good reflection on the state of rural within areas (although often picked up in the sustainable community strategy).
- Links to Audit Commission and good practice would be very welcome.

Challenge of getting rural into the LAA

Comments made by the Forum:

- Urban/rural – it is difficult to know where the LAA indicator is being delivered.
- There is not a specific rural indicator to get involved in.

Action Points for the Forum:

- Wait for more formal report and then there is a role for the Forum in feeding back to Defra re the fact that DSO for strong rural communities will not be achieved.
- Invite Audit Commission to next Forum to discuss these issues in relation to CAA.

Additional comments made by the Board

- We must make sure that the whole rural picture is captured, not just the land-based
- We must capture the importance of the third sector in rural areas and involve them in the development of ideas
- The Forum still has gaps and needs more representation from the Health and Police services and organisations such as the Fire Authority and Drainage Authorities

Item 3: Update on priorities work

The Chairman was very keen to make sure that all members of the Rural Board had signed up to one or more of the priorities. Some might be able to offer financial help to take something forward rather than their own time which might be very limited.

Three Board members were not present but Keith Mitchell has made known where he would like to help, Andy Brown has offered his help, and Pam Doodes had already led on some work. The Rural Board Working Group were going to be helping Board members develop all priorities

Priority 1: Influencing regional architecture

Paul suggested that Pam Doodes (who is the current lead on this) would be more appropriate to lead on Affordable Housing.

Chris Corrigan had already offered his support and now Ray Ellis and Keith Mitchell also agreed their support on this priority. Paul Bettison and Andrew Bowles are already closely connected to the new architecture through their local authority colleagues. No formal lead yet identified.

Action so far:

Pam Doodes, supported by Gillian Cameron Waller, had already obtained the agreed diagram of the new structures and the membership lists of the various Boards. Terms of reference though were not yet available.

Paul Bettison has sent out letters to Paul Carter, Jim Brathwaite and Pam Alexander of SEEDA about the future offer from the Rural Board, and he had also invited all of them to attend a future Rural Board meeting. Pam Alexander had responded welcoming and recognising the potential role of the South East Rural Board and suggested that the SEEDA lead Martin Tugwell would get in touch with the Rural Board in the first instance. Paul agreed to invite Martin to the next Board meeting.

ACTIONS AGREED for Priority 1:

- (i) The Working Group would obtain the Terms of Reference for each of the new Boards and names of the secretariat that would support them
- (ii) Paul Bettison and Andrew Bowles would discuss potential of the Rural Board with their SEEC colleagues.
- (iii) A pack of information on the new structures be sent to all Board members in due course.
- (iv) Paul Bettison invite Martin Tugwell to the September Rural Board meeting

Priority 2 was discussed in depth after lunch

Priority 3: Broadband

Broad band work is led by Andrew Bowles although the work was not able to start until after the Local Authority elections.

Action so far:

Andrew has secured firm offers of help from Peter Gilroy Chief Executive of Kent County Council, Roger Patterson Horsham DC, and Warren Whyte (Aylesbury Vale LSP).. Ray Ellis would contribute something from the Hampshire experimental broadband project using schools. The Lord Carter report was published on 16th June 2009 and GOSE indicated they would be carrying out an evaluation of its implications. There should be a link to Home Based businesses.

ACTIONS AGREED on Priority 3:

- (i). GOSE to carry out and circulate and analysis of the Carter Review

- (ii). Ray Ellis to provide input from Hampshire piloting
- (iii). Andrew Bowles to set up sub-group meeting to review options, and to bring an options paper to the next Board meeting.

Priority 4: Healthy living/sustainable production and consumption

This is still a priority that is not clearly defined. Issues identified in discussion were: food security; population growth; health; how to ensure that consumers' choices were based on an understanding of consequences. It was agreed that further development of the priority is needed, to ensure the workstream will add value to work that is already being undertaken by Board members organisations. Shaun Leavey presented to the Board a draft copy of the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy Charter for local government outlining the 5 main themes which will also help deliver some of this priority.

Mike Daly; Shaun Leavey, Alan Law and Ray Ellis all offered their support for this priority but no lead is identified yet.

ACTIONS AGREED on Priority 4:

- (i) A meeting would be arranged by Valerie Carter of the Working Group with the interested parties which would refine the objective: select a lead Board member
- (ii) Their agreed proposal sent to other Board members for their comments/ approval. The Working group members would be invited to take part in this preliminary meeting

Priority 5: Affordable Housing

No work had yet been done on this. A lead needed to be established and it was recognised that the work undertaken by Wealden District Council on housing made Pam Doodes the ideal Board member to lead on this.

Support was offered by Keith Mitchell and Geoff Butler.

ACTION AGREED on Priority 5:

- (i) Paul Bettison would contact Pam Doodes to confirm that she would take over the lead role on affordable housing – but thank her for the work that she and Gill Cameron Waller had done so far on the first priority on influencing the new architecture
- (ii) Must take on board the points raised by the Forum on the Matthew Taylor report
- (iii) Evaluate evidence and report to the next Board meeting in September

Extra Priority:

Climate Change and Water

Harvey Bradshaw, backed by Chris Corrigan raised concern that Climate Change was not a specific priority. All agreed that climate change was critical both for remediation needed as well as offering opportunities for such things as new crops. Water management was going to be vital in this region including the threat from flooding.

The role of the regional Climate Change partnership was recognised and the Board should not duplicate their work but rather identify and develop the specific rural implications.

ACTION AGREED on Climate Change:

(i) It was agreed that climate change was not a priority on its own but an underlying theme and needed to underpin all the priorities rather than dealt with in isolation.

(ii) Harvey Bradshaw would act as the Rural Board's champion on water and climate change and make sure that it formed part of the development of each of the 5 priorities.

Item 4

Developing rural evidence/defining the rural offer and making it happen

The priority work 2 is led Jeremy Leggett.

Support has already been offered by Andy Brown. Following the discussion under Item 4 offers of support now include Alan Betts, Chris Corrigan, Mike Daly, Harvey Bradshaw and Alan Law (Board Members), and GOSE, SEEDA, Chris Edwards and Jacinta Thorley of the Working Group

Jeremy Leggett introduced his paper which he stressed was intended to be provocative. An in-depth discussion followed on both the summary evidence base and the draft 1000 statement about rural SE. ,

Discussion flowed into the next stage – on how to make things happen and how could we reach agreement on a 1000 word statement that could set out our clear case of the 'rural offer'. It is this document which would then be used to improve the new regional architecture's understanding and influence their future activities and investment proposals.

Comments from the discussion:

- The statement needed to be specific to the South East – not just a generic rural picture.
- We need to assess just how much 'rural' thinking is already embedded in sub regional strategies
- We need to engage more with the Commission for Rural Communities and their national lead role and their research
- We need to interpret better the implications from national datasets such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation and identify what it is telling us
- There are gaps in Jeremy's statements on skills needs; technology opportunities; exclusion (including migrant workers); the health and obesity challenge; biodiversity, and access to green space

- The region faces choices of actions so the examination of potential consequences of any actions will be critical
- We need a lot more information on trends – it is not just about where we are now
- We need to map evidence across different parts of the region – it is not an even picture - there are spatial differences (in health etc)
- Some activities give multiple benefits which should be demonstrated clearly eg. forestry seems under reported yet offers benefits to health, biodiversity and renewable energy as well as to the economy
- We must better understand exclusion and what it means in this region – including the impact on migrant workers
- We need to understand the value of green spaces and access in different parts of the region, including implications for growth areas
- Skills shortages will be critical to make use of any new opportunities
- How will the SFFS Charter for local government help tie local government into the five core SFFS themes and also feed strongly into the developing priority on healthy living/sustainable consumption and give a stronger message
- What are the major supermarkets (changes in shopping patterns, reduction in food miles etc) telling us
- We must not forget the large opportunities offered by London being on our doorstep – and look at what the existing work with London has achieved and making use of the findings of Sector Champions in the land-based industries work
- What about influencing future generations through children and the potential legacy from the recent Year of Food and Farming campaign
- How much are we really under threat in the South East on biodiversity – and what kind of biodiversity do we want in the region and what about the things which have been more positive
- What is the real value of heritage in this region – built and landscape heritage

ACTIONS AGREED on Priority 2:

(i) Eventual preparation of 1000 word statement on the regions 'rural offer' after the gathering and evaluation exercise set below

(ii) Individual members of the Board agreed to provide Jeremy with factual input on the 'evidence base', by 10 July 2009

(iii) The Working group will develop an Action Plan setting out details of what should be done, by whom and by when.- the first draft to go out with the minutes.

- actions needed must be set out clearly and each one identifying the potential consequences of any such action
- all evidence must have clearly identified sources
- wherever possible evidence should look at trends not just about where we are now

(iv) The specific evidence gathering should include:

- GOSE providing an interpretation of the Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Jacinta Thorley interpret what was the OSCI evidence is telling us

- SEEDA will try and find evidence on economic trends – including turnover per employee, increase in profit margins (recent report on land based economy gives some of this)
- SEEDA working with the NFU and Shaun Leavey will look at the most recent statistics on land-based industries - including diversity of crops in the region – look at implications of high land prices, growing importance of viticulture, reliance on migrant labour; look at Food Standards Agency statistics and evaluate what they tell us
- SEEDA will develop the case for skills improvements
- Working Group will review the recent Business Links study and evaluate findings on home based businesses
- SEEDA and the NFU will provide evidence and help with exclusion arguments re migrant workers
- Mike Daly and Jeremy Leggett will look at spatial implications on health and the potential technology in medicine
- Harvey Bradshaw – as part of his lead role on water and climate change will look at the future implications re water quality and waste water
- Alan Betts and Chris Edwards will look at what the current data on green spaces, access and footpath network (must include coastal access) and evaluate is telling us about access potential
- Alan Law and Chris Corrigan will provide the case for biodiversity
- Alan Betts will develop the case for the contribution of the regions forests to both environmental and economic objectives
- Andy Brown, and Chris Edwards will develop the heritage offer with evidence
- Working Group and Andrew Bowles will review the Lord Carter report launched on 16 June 2009 and evaluate findings and report on broadband potential to next Board meeting in September
- Housing evidence report to the next Board meeting in September

AOB:

No items put forward

Date of next meeting:

Friday 18th September 2009 at GOSE offices