

South East Rural Board
The Army & Navy Club: 36-39 Pall Mall: LONDON SW1Y 5JN
Tuesday 21st April 2009: 13.00 – 16.00

Minutes of Meeting

Attendees:

Paul Bettison – Chair

Board Members

Yvonne Arthurs (on behalf of Mike Daly) – representing the Health Authorities

Alan Betts – Forestry Commission

Andrew Bowles – representing the Rural Forum for the South East

Andy Brown – English Heritage

Chris Corrigan - RSPB

Pam Doodes – representing District Councils

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:

Gill Cameron- Waller – Wealden District Council

Valerie Carter - SEEDA

Dougal Driver (representing Julie Price - also GOSE Observer on the Board)

Chris Edwards- Natural England

Apologies:

Harvey Bradshaw – Environment Agency

Geoff Butler – representing business

Mike Daly – Health Authorities (but represented by Yvonne Arthurs)

Keith Mitchell – SEEDA (but represented by Oona Muirhead)

Jacinta Thorley – Working Group

Item 1: Welcome & Introductions

1.1 The chair welcomed members and their substitutes to the second Board meeting

Item 2: New Board member

2.1 The Chair introduced the new Board member, Andrew Bowles who is the new Chairman of the Rural Forum for the South East. (His biography was included in the Board pack).

SEEDA changes:

2.2 Before Item 3 Oona gave a very brief outline on the changes taking place in SEEDA which should set the context for future discussion at the Board. SEEDA had been looking at its future focus and the need for this review had been amplified

by the recession, coupled with a reduction in SEEDA's funding of 20% . The agency would become a much smaller body, with a greater focus on business, especially sectors with high growth potential. SEEDA would continue to be about making things happen, but not necessarily with its own money. Many of the Board members, but not all, will have had a letter from the SEEDA Chief Executive, Pam Alexander explaining these changes. Discussions had taken place with partners about the implications for joint programmes. In general, we were able to fund legal and near-legal commitment but any new work would need to compete for remaining resources and be tested firmly against our new agenda.

2.3 SEEDA was determined that delivery should continue through the change process. We also had to bear in mind that public sector funding would become tighter in future months and years.

Item 3: Resources Report

3.1 The report was introduced with two options for Board decision:

Option 1: The first option is that Board member organisations continue to fund basic costs of running meetings (making full use of any money from Defra) and agree to undertake specific other work required by the Board – using their own staff or finance resources

Option 2: The second option is that the key partners share the costs of any work programme: with SEEDA as the economic partner; Natural England/Environment Agency as the environment partner with a small contribution for the South East Rural Community Council network as the social partner organisation

3.2 Discussion followed which made it clear that we could look for funding help from players not represented on the Board but that any potential of resources from the new regional architecture is likely to be far too small to be able to give any real help.

ACTION AGREED

Option 1 was agreed by the Board - but with the caveat that we recognise the real difficulties of financial resources likely to be available

New regional architecture:

3.3 Discussion then focussed on the new architecture for the region. Paul had sent the letter to both Paul Carter and Pam Alexander (South East England Councils SEEC) as agreed at the Away Day offering the Rural Board to be the voice and champion of rural areas to help the new structures. No response has yet been received.

3.4 It was agreed that the Rural Board must make sure that these new bodies fully understand the rural dimension – particularly on key infrastructure such as housing and transport. Keith Mitchell of SEEDA and a Rural Board member will be part of the new Strategy Board

3.5 Board members must make sure that the key players who sit on these new Boards are fully and very regularly briefed and naturally consider rural needs as part of their thinking. Our influencing should be embedded within these new structures – probably through identifying champions – rather than running alongside them. We will need to make sure that and key policy papers include the rural dimension – but accept that it will need some creativity to achieve this.

3.6 The new structures will be looking at mainstream interventions and rural must be considered as part of this. For instance a very large number of businesses in the region are based in rural areas – nearly a third of all businesses

Agenda Item 4: Main Item – discussion on Board priorities

4.1 The Chair introduced the session for the two workshops. Discussions should focus on the real benefits that the Board can bring – making sure that it adding value and doing more than just the sum of its individual member’s objectives. The Board should concentrate on a few items and do those well. Priorities need to inspire enthusiasm and the time spent on them valued.

Workshop 1 included Andrew Bowles, Andy Brown, Chris Corrigan, Alan Law, Jeremy Leggett, Oona Muirhead, supported by Gill Cameron Waller and Dougal Driver. Discussion of Workshop 1 focussed on:

Workshop 2 included Paul Bettison, Yvonne Arthurs, Alan Betts, Pam Doodes, Ray Ellis, Shaun Leavey, supported by Valerie Carter and Chris Edwards. Discussion of Workshop 2 focussed on:

4.2 The two workshops came together in a plenary session and outlined their conclusions on priorities. Each priority will have a lead and a support group

4.3 **Workshop 1 priorities** focussed around the following priorities as identified at the Awayday:

- Influencing the Regional Architecture: having the right tools and processes to achieve this. Radically, this might include changing the ways in which sustainability is measured so that rural communities do not always come out as un-sustainable. Offering rural communities for the testing of interventions. An early success measure would be that the regional bodies invite and welcome rural Board input and this is embedded into routine procedures. Another success measure would be evidence of the value-added from rural interventions. Data would be required which should draw on eg work in Wales on a methodology showing what you get for £1 of spend in rural areas, and how quality of life underpins competitive advantage. A literature review of methodology might be required.
- Tackling Broadband as a social equity issue. Determining the winning interventions which might include lobbying with hard evidence about the economics. Success measures might include getting common cause with other RDAs (GSE) and mention in the Conservative Green paper.
- Capturing good practice in ‘real’ language and sharing and communicating this. Success measures would include more media stories on the sustainability of rural communities. Stories and data would underpin the other priorities.

4.4 **Workshop 2 priorities** focussed around the priority raised at the Away Day – sustainable production and consumption. It was accepted that it was a huge subject and a lot of work is already led through the South East Sustainable Food and Farming Board, chaired by Shaun Leavey. They had five major themes and any task group could not cover all aspects but must focus down. The debate focussed around the following:

- we had lost 34% of horticulture acreage over the last 20 years, yet there were huge populations on the doorstep;
- potential for import substitution (we only provide 25% of our fruit needs)
- the need to improve public procurement but there were barriers to it happening / do we know what they are / can we do something about them / is it about raising awareness ?
- how can we directly influence and change health policy and health inequalities across the region re local production – re healthy diets / save money / less obesity through locally produced fruit and veg
- do we know what are the best crops in terms of energy use and carbon capture,
- the need ensure environmental quality is built into production,
- potential benefits to biodiversity
- we need real evidence on current GVA and future potential
- do we understand the linkages / identify gaps etc
- the threats of climate change yet we are already a water-stressed region
- how can the Board add real value to the existing work of the Sustainable Food and farming Board ?

The workshop also raised the important issues of the need for more affordable housing in rural areas. .

<p>PRIORITIES AGREED</p> <p>1. Influencing the Regional Architecture to ensure a Rural Focus. Getting Rural embedded into the structure and processes. Potentially with rural champions on each of the new Boards. This might prove easy, or not. The lead agreed was Pam Doodes, with Chris Corrigan; Working Group and GOSE.</p> <p>2. Getting clear evidence and stories, both quantitative and qualitative which will demonstrate what gives this region its competitive edge and which can then be used to influence the new regional structures, raise the rural profile and feed into and influence the new single Regional Strategy. – it must be multi dimensional and look at quality of life indicators too The lead agreed was Jeremy Leggett, supported by all members of the Working Group .</p> <p>3. Broadband is regarded as critical, but awaits some conclusions from the Lord Carter report. Andrew Bowles will lead this priority, given his LGA position and the need to link to other regions. Andrew would address the priority post local elections, with help from Oona and SEEDA to drive it forward</p>
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4. A priority around **Sustainable Production and Consumption** was identified but there were concerns that the priority needed to be further defined (not just links into the health sector's future thinking and identifying the environmental benefits that could accompany it) and reservations on this choice were raised. No one offered to lead this work but offers of help from SEEDA, Health Authorities, and Natural England. The Chair and the Working Group will further develop this concept.

5: Future priority around **affordable housing** but not in any detail yet

Item 5: Future Board meetings:

5.1 Future topics for Board meetings will evolve as these priorities are developed. There was discussion of the success measures for the next Board meeting which should drive the agenda:

- The need for relevance of action to the recession and beyond
- How labour and management are skilled up eg;,
 - opportunities and potential for 'green jobs'
 - need to improve skills in the horticulture sector to meet modern industry needs; including improved management of this workforce, using best practice (LGA report and Planet Earth project in Thanet, Kent) and building on the work already being led by Shaun Leavey

5.2 There still needs to be a follow up of the work done for SEEDA by Warwick University

5.3 Please note that the next Board meeting is **19 June 2009**

Followed by meetings:

- 18 September 2009
- 11 December 2009

Board will get more detailed information on venues etc nearer the time. It is planned that meetings will be held in Guildford.

Item 6: AOB

6.1 The Board were informed of the forthcoming Rural Summit being staged by the Commission for Rural Communities and EEDA and SEEDA. It is being held on 30th June 2009 and members of the Board may be called upon to speak at this event. Unfortunately the LGA conference is the same day.