



Steering Group Meeting

The Pelly Room, Boreham, Chelmsford, Essex

Monday 25th January 2016 Time: 13:30

MINUTES

Attendees

John Buchanan	JBu
Peter Chillingworth	PC
Suzanne Harris	SH
Cllr Roger Hirst	RH
Paul Hinsley	PH
Mick Page	MP
Dominic Petre	DP
Lizzie Rose	LR
Nick Shuttleworth	NS
Philip Wilson	PW

Apologies:

Cannon John Brown
Joy Darby
Marcus Roberts

1) Minutes of the previous meeting

- Accuracy

List of Steering Group meeting dates: minutes stated 24th April this is a mistake the actual date is Monday 25th April 2016.

Approved

- Matters arising - None

Cllr Roger Hirst is attending the Rural Farming Network (RFN) meeting next week so the purpose of this meeting is to discuss as a partnership what we need to put across.

Based on DEFRA's Agenda.

2) RFN meeting

- EU funding opportunities

Following an in depth group analysis it was recognised that EU Funding opportunities are not being utilised as much in the Essex area compared to Kent. This raised the question as to why?

Is the system and process easier to access? Currently within Essex two applications have passed the first stage process however one has left due to the complicated next stage. Kent has received twenty applications. There is no difference between regions and LEPS as confirmed by Cllr Hirst by saying the EU only recognise LEPS. The process is the same for all areas having seen other forms which appear to be the same as National and are scored by DEFRA. Lead time is an issue and the length required to apply should be lengthened including transparency. Knowledge and understanding is poor within the farming community proving to be confusing as to what they can apply for, and there is a problem of cross compliance.

LEADER is more accessible and has been available in areas such as Kent for a longer period of time. Therefore the Kent area is more aware and familiar to applying for grants giving them the expertise to continue with larger grant systems.

It appears the applications are being received from individuals, again by recognising the driving force it appears Kent are more self-sufficient and Essex may need further guidance and support to obtain what they rightfully can apply for. Its needs to be put across that by applying do it for what an individual actually desires not change a business plan for something that isn't quite right for their business. CLA and NFU could be a source for information and guidance for farmers.

LEADER is considered a more flexible grant scheme it is a lesser amount however it can be used to build upon an existing project providing more scope.

SH – Adam raised some of the stewardship schemes are too complicated and need to be made more attractive. Need to remove the fear factor.

SH – To action for CH for this. [How Kent have been so successful compared to Essex.](#)

DP - No themes remove *limitations* and base business change/plans on benefits economic, environment and community.

Note a new upcoming opportunity: There is the start of a land rush for a new form of renewable energy battery technology. By placing shipping containers full of batteries by a substation and charge in the early hours of the morning and then put back at peak rate.

Profit comes from the switching batteries between charge and discharge to put the resource back in earn a huge amount.

- **Rural Proofing**

SH - Cornwall have asked for this to placed on the agenda. They want to talk about how it is or isn't being carried out in parts of the country.

NS – This maybe in connection with the 'Independent Rural-Proofing Implementation Review' report published by Lord Cameron 30th January 2015.

The review assessed how well government departments were at including rural issues in policy making and decision taking – a process known as rural proofing. The document highlighted some important areas where simple changes can be made to strengthen rural proofing efforts.

It included a call for the government to set up a 'rural proofing forum' to share best practice across departments.

The concern for this is that it will cause a divide between town and country.

- **The food industry**

This could be in connection with the impact of the national living wage and the damage to competitiveness to businesses.

The Resolution Foundation has published a new report on the impact of the National Living Wage (NLW). However the report that looks at city areas not rural. There is a perception that businesses have welcomed proposals of a higher wage for their staff, but what of the smaller firms? The introduction of this scheme in April could well affect many small firms, and certain key sectors such as farming and tourism, who are considered to be among the worst affected as labour-intensive trades become increasingly unprofitable.

CH – Smaller businesses will receive National insurance relief and will get reduction in corporation tax

DP – Most of employees are in tied cottages no discount for that to employees.

Recognition of benefits received as well as the higher minimum wage i.e. tied accommodation.

- **Non-food horticulture**

Medical/Herbs – non food

Biomass Fuels?

Planning?

Plant protection products drive for them not to be used

Pesticides for Bees?

Legal Highs – labelled as plant food

CH – what would we like on the agenda?

SH – comment on their reduced communication hear a lot less from DEFRA than in the beginning.

DP – Explanation of what they do is getting worse.

PW – What will happen with the RPA – ask Suzanne

3) Update on the Essex Rural Strategy refresh

Philip Wilson reported to the group that the survey has been successful with approx 1600 responses from across the county. The report will be published soon, what it did highlight was that no one under 30 years of age completed it.

The report is showing certain themes we would expect such as:

- Housing
- People generally feel safe in Essex
- People felt they were paying a premium in rural area petrol, heating etc
- Transport – was mentioned but not seen as a problem as most people owned and drove their own car.
- Broadband is an issue but it is being addressed
- Mobile reception also a problem

The Strategy has been started with chapters being written, the full ERP meeting in February will address all the information. Marcus Roberts is obtaining useful statistics and evidence that we have not been aware of which is adding to the current information formulating an exciting strategy.

Due to the extensive valuable information received the Working Strategy group have put forward the proposal that two documents are produced. One being evidenced based and the other will make reference to the evidence base information. This is to avoid an overload of intensive but extremely relevant information being squeezed into one document.

This will also provide an opportunity to update the evidence base information to keep statistics current up to date. (Perhaps every two years) To have the strategy set in this way would be very useful to others such as local authorities, and include a plea if the user can add to the document then please contact us. The consultation results have provided no reason for the Strategy to be changed in any way.

The launch date was discussed with an aim of May 2016 this is based on the following:

We will circulate the data document for checking but will have to be done before the strategy. Steering group will be privy to all information and given approx two weeks to look at it. Followed by the full ERP who also will receive two weeks.

Essex Rural Strategy launch event

- Timing and format

Liz Truss is not available for the launch.

PW – Suggested having seen the programme “Meet the Street” which is presented by James Martin. This is based on how people are surviving rural life, and James Martin has encapsulated what we are seeing. The theme being “All about building the community.”

It was suggested to discuss the launch date at the next full ERP meet 15th February.

Next ERP meeting:

Venue: Chelmsford City Race Course

Date: 15th February 2016

Time: Optional Lunch will be provided at: 12:30

Meeting start time: 13:00

Agenda TBC

AOB

None