



STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the Meeting held on 1st August 2007

RCCE Offices, Feering

Present:

Chair - Peter Martin (PM)	Vice Chair – John Brown (JB)
Cllr. John Jowers – ECC (JJ)	Philip Wilson – ECC (PW)
Terry Taber – FSB (TT)	Keith Blackburn – ECC (KBL)
Dianne Hardy – Exdra (DH)	Richard Woolley – RCCE (RW)
Peter Baggott - EALC (PB)	Joy Sheppard- EALC (JS)
Peter Chillingworth- (PC)	Mick Page – EERF (MP)
Suzanne Roast - RCCE (SR)	Nick Shuttleworth – RCCE (NS)
Keith Blackburn- ECC (KB)	Minutes -Kirsty Monk (KM)

Apologies:

Chris Allen –EEDA (CA)	Gemma Driscoll ECC - (GD)
Sandy Cruickshank -Go East (SC)	Ed Gregory- ECC (EG)
John Hall– EWT (JH)	Wendy Scattergood – ELGA (WS)

The Chair, Peter Martin welcomed all to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

1 Minutes of the previous Steering Group meeting, 16th May 2007 & matters arising

No matters of accuracy were raised

The minutes were agreed by those present.

The following were reported as updates/ matters arising from those minutes:

Item11, pg 5, ERP Website and ERP Promotional Material.

SR advised the meeting that the Essex Rural Partnership Website was now up and running and any suggestions, Links or special topics of interest from members, to add to the website would be most welcome.

The ERP promotional materials were now also available and examples were distributed to the members present.

Other matters arising were covered within the main agenda items.

2 East of England Rural Forum (EERF)

Mick Page (MP) reported that the paper on planning issues that he had prepared with Keith Blackburn had now gone forward and was an important item at the last EERF meeting.

The Soapbox item on transport in rural areas has been put the agenda as a major item and Essex had been shown to be taking the lead on this issue.

Skills development in rural areas had also been highlighted at the meeting.

JS reported that EALC had lost their current representative on the EERF but were hoping that John Buchannon would be able to take their place on the EERF.

The group held a general discussion on planning and the effects of the LDA's statutory powers replacing local plans the role of Rural Development Agencies (RDA). They expressed concerned at the implications of the abolition of the regional assemblies and the transfer of powers to the Regional Development Agencies. The Group were also concerned that there was not a future structure where they could deliver "rural" concerns at present. It was felt that the ERP should get to know the new Local Development Frameworks and Local Strategic Partnerships and create opportunities for ERP input.

PM explained that the RDA's were being encouraged to hand down their responsibilities downwards to regional level.

Actions:

PM felt that the planning issue should be taken up at County and District level also and a meeting should be arranged with the Essex Planning Association.

Discussion of the Local Development Framework and the Rural Development Agency and the implications for rural areas, to be held at a future meeting of the partnership.

Outstanding Action; Invitation to be sent to John Yates (Chair of EERF) to come to the Steering Group Meeting at a future date. – SR

3 Appointment of the New Chairman of the ERP

The Steering Group agreed to recommend the John Jowers stand for election as the new Chair of the Essex Rural Partnership at the next ERP meeting on 12/09/07. All ERP Members will be notified.

4 Reports from the Action Groups.

Community Action Group (CAG)

Suzanne Roast

SR explained that the CAG next meeting was due to take place 5th September 2007 and SR had been continuing review and highlight the priority actions on the ERSAP (Essex Rural Strategy Action Plan).

Economic Action Group

Keith Blackburn

KBL advised the meeting that the next meeting of the Economic Action Group on the 17/08/07 and would carry out a stock take of the issues covered by the group to date such as funding, social enterprise, diversification of rural areas, migrant workers, market towns, sustainable construction techniques, excess signage, planning, fear of crime in rural areas etc. On the issue of diversification, there was to be a meeting with the EPFA and they also planned to cover work on the way planning is perceived in rural areas.

Action:

JS explained that EALC have a planning day booked for the Autumn, and asked whether KBL could liaise with her to arrange a speaker to that event.

KBL to advise KM/SR of the other planning workshop details for circulation, PM suggested that a planning officers at District and County level be invited to the workshop.

Environment Action Group

Peter Baggott

PB advised that the EnvAG met at the beginning of July and were given a presentation on sustainable communities, which will be the basis for the next LAA. The ECC procurement drive and the Essex Carbon reduction programme were discussed. The Flood risk strategy needed to be updated and they had also reviewed the impact of the lights off saving pilot schemes operating in Uttlesford and Maldon. They had felt that a farming conference should be arranged. The EconAG are due to meet next in September.

PM thought that a farming conference would be an excellent idea as Farmers were keen to develop Biomass industries and other sources of renewable energy. However there needs to be a demand created for this fuel before we think about delivery. The use of fallen livestock to be used for sustainable fuel source and the lack of abattoirs in Essex should also be looked into.

PB felt that the issue of the impact of converting food crops to bio mass crops and the affects on future food prices should also be looked into.

Action:

The group agreed that the biomass industries and other sources of renewable energy in farming should be flagged up as an area of work for the ERP in the future.

5 Essex Rural Strategy Action Plan Update (ERSAP)

SR reported that the action groups were now all reviewing their priorities on the action plan. An environmental section has been added and the EnvAG are putting together fact sheets together on conservation and sustainable energy. SR highlighted the need for continuous rolling review of this document and continual ERSAP updates would be a useful tool.

Action:

- SR to update the ERSAP with the Environmental Action Plan for the September SG meeting (12/09/07).
- The SG felt that a Red Amber Green system for the ERSAP should be put into place

6 Year Of Food and Farming YOFF

PW advised the Group that the Year of food and farming national launch event would be on 12/09/07 at Highgrove (The Prince of Wales is the Patron of the YOFF).

A large event for school children had been organised for the 01/05/08 at Writtle college and over 3000 primary school children were to be invited.

JJ reported that ECC proposed to support the YOFF and had put this forward as a bid for the next budget proposal.

Action: PW to liaise with Chris Philpot and report back at the next meeting re YOFF.

Outstanding action:

SR to liaise and invite Simon Bryson to the Steering Group

7 Rural Post Offices Update

SR advised the meeting that since the working group meetings with Post Office Ltd and Post Watch they had slightly revised their strategy. Posters and a briefing, advising communities of the imminent public consultation on the closure of certain rural post offices had been sent to all Parish Councils in Essex and to village halls. Press releases and radio interviews had been carried out to raise public awareness on this issue. Version 2 of the poster will be sent out when the closures have been announced and a template letter and guidance will be available to communities affected. Cambs ACRE have come on board with the poster campaign and this has reduced printing costs. Essex is very much leading the way on this issue. The Post Office is dividing the nation into 40-50 areas and these will be put through the process sequentially. Essex is amongst the first areas to be put through the process. Nationally 2500 post offices are due to close, 1250 of which will be in rural areas.

Actions

- TT asked for 10-30 posters to pass on to the Federation of small businesses - (KM/SR)
- This item to be put on the agenda of the next Full partnership meeting.

8 RSCP Update

SR reported RSCP projects were running to plan and to budget. More money was required to keep this going next year after March 2008 but no indication of what would replace the RSCP next year had been given.

JS went on to report that she the continued professional development of Parish Clerks was going well with a 63% pass rate and the Quality Council Status scheme was running well. JS was concerned that only half the RSCP monies had been received.

Action:

SR to speak to Terry Lepley -RCCE and find out why the full fund had not been received and report to JS.

9 liC Business Plan Update

The Rural Retail Research Post

SR advised that she was commencing interviews in early September for a part time Research Post regarding rural retail research. The post would run for 3 months.

DH advised that liC were concentrating on prioritising schemes that were already up and running for the current business plan.

The group discussed the issues facing market towns and the benefits of farmers markets to rural towns and villages.

DH advised that liC could only support projects that met the deprivation criteria set out in the terms and conditions of the fund.

Action: SR to update the group at the next meeting regarding the Research Post.

11 Themes/ points considered for the next meeting 12th September 2007

The theme following suggestions were made:

- To periodically use a different format for the meeting such as workshops with break out groups.
- ERSAP to be discussed and RAG system used.
- Farming and the Year of Food and Farming
- ERP promotional material to be distributed.
- ERP Website to be finalised and promoted
- Impact of Regional change – ERA
- Local Councils to be given permission to build council housing.
- Kevin Jones, renewable energy sources.
- New Topic: The LAA process/ Essex Compact - suggested for the full ERP meeting theme.
- LDFs and LSPs impact on rural communities.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The Date of the next steering group meeting was agreed to be 12th September 2007, 2.00pm - 4.00pm, High Barn, Great Bard Field following the main Full Member Meeting and Lunch.

Action: future dates for the Steering Group to be timetabled with the Steering Group

Meeting concluded 4.40pm