



**ERP Environment Action Group Meeting  
20<sup>th</sup> June 2011, RCCE Offices, Feering  
10.00am**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Matthew Searle (MaS) (Chair)	Essex County Council
Daisy Martlew (DM) (Minutes)	RCCE
Suzanne Harris (SH)	RCCE
George Courtauld (GC)	RCCE
Adrian Gascoyne (AG)	Essex County Council
Lindsey Allen (LA)	Forestry Commission
Roy Read (RR)	Maldon District Council
Rob Wise (RW)	CLA
Canon John Brown (JB)	Church of England

**Apologies:**

Rosemary Padfield, Brenda Towle, Mark Iley, Tricia Moxey, Mike Sandison, Christopher Hewitt, Andrew St Joseph, David Knagg

**1 Welcome and Apologies**

MS welcomed everyone to the meeting and wished to thank John Hall for all the work he has done in championing the countryside and environment.

**2 Minutes of previous meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011**

Agreed as accurate.

**3 Matters Arising**

**3.1 Update on Terms of Reference**

MS will update at the next meeting.

**MS**

**3.2 Progress with Woodland Checklist**

Brian Stacey has written the Woodland Strategy, which has been approved and adopted by the ERP. Unfortunately there is a lack of funds to publish the document, but the intention is to publish the Strategy online plus print a few hard copies. MS will update the EnvAG on the progress of this in the next two weeks.

**MS**

Brain Stacey and John Hall have produced a Woodland Checklist at the request of landowners. MS suggested that this be presented at the next meeting.

**BS/MS**

GC suggested that LA send the information that she has on woodlands to the NFU and CLA to include in their monthly newsletters for publicity and promotion. LA will email GC to request for contact details of the above. MS added that Parish Council networks should be included. This could also be a good opportunity to publicise the Woodland Strategy.

LA/GC

GC recommended that the EnvAG keep in touch with the transport department at ECC – roads act as vital wildlife corridors and if we keep abreast of any new developments, we can have an input into how the benefits to wildlife could be managed.

#### 4 **Dedham Vale AONB Extension**

MS reported that it is the desire of the Chairman of the Dedham Vale Partnership and others to extend the AONB area up to five miles to Sudbury and possibly beyond, up the whole river valley. The Chairman met Councillors Peter Martin and Tracey Chapman at ECC, who both support the initiative. Likewise the leaders of Braintree DC expressed their support. We need to get unanimous agreement from all councils within the area.

It is likely to take a substantial period of time for the proposal to go through Natural England, however – there was strong support for the Stour extension, which took ten years. Natural England has received at least 50 proposals for extensions across the country and we are not sure where we are on the list.

The proposal needs funding and a strong landscape evidence base. The officer in charge is producing an action plan, which MS will circulate to the EnvAG in the next couple of months.

MS

RW highlighted that the extension had been proposed in the past but turned down as the area was not of significant landscape value. GC added that the area is tied to Constable, therefore is good for tourism. The Colne Stour Association, made up of several landowners, supports the extension as they wish to prevent a high level of development in the area. MS explained that the proposal is in the early stages but the high level of support so far is encouraging.

RW suggested that, from a landowner's point of view, the number of designations they are faced with leads to 'designation fatigue' - they need to *really* see the value of such proposals. CLA is looking at the overhaul of the planning system and its effect on the countryside. What can an AONB do for sustainable development?

MS reported that local councils are no longer being encouraged to put forward local designations, therefore national designations are important in protecting the countryside.

MS will keep the EnvAG updated. It was agreed that the EnvAG express support and interest in becoming involved in the proposal.

MS

#### 5 **Government's Natural Environment White Paper & Local Nature Partnerships**

MS explained that, as outlined in the White Paper, the Government wishes to have a fresh look at Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs). A local biodiversity indicator group led by the Essex Wildlife Trust was set up, which managed to hit its targets and aimed to leave a legacy to take forward. This group could possibly become a LNP; however there is some ambiguity over what the White Paper means by 'local' and much reference is made to LEPs.

GC highlighted that the Greater Essex, Kent and East Sussex LEP has a rural

representative, Jon Regan, who sits on the board. This is important as the LEP appears to be very urban-based and the more say we have the better. SH added that Jon Regan will be giving a presentation at the full ERP meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> October (meeting after next).

JB suggested that we initiate some preliminary discussions between the EnvAG and the former biodiversity group. MS will draw up an action plan and report back to the group.

**MS**

## **6 Funding to support environmental initiatives**

SH reported that funding from the Lottery had been secured for the Edible Essex project, with the aim of establishing 30 new allotment sites and 10 new orchards. There is also a facility for training, offering support to groups and Parish Councils. The bid took 18 months to build however the project was very much demand-led, which was most probably a major factor in securing the funding.

MS suggested that the EnvAG always be on the lookout for potential external sources of funding. The Funding Officer from Dedham Vale might be interested in coming along to a meeting to talk to us.

SH added that any organisation in the EnvAG could put a bid in through the ERP, with agreement of its members, as it may add weight to the bid.

MS suggested the Sustainable Development Fund totalling £40 thousand a year for local interest/voluntary groups for small scale environmental projects. LA reported that the Woodland Trust is pushing its diamond woodland project for the Queen's jubilee. Braintree and Bocking Gardens is applying for this. RR added that there is lots of funding available for sports fields, for example the Lottery fund linked to the Olympics.

RW highlighted a potential problem regarding a shortfall of funding for Higher Level Stewardship next year. There are a number of people in 'classic' schemes coming up for renewal – many landowners do not appreciate the changes in terms of options available and higher standards. Therefore there is likely to be a 'crunch' next year, whereby some landowners will lose out on the schemes they have applied for, with the resulting danger that some types of habitat will be lost; the Government will get higher quality schemes, but fewer of them.

## **7 Proposed joint meeting with the Economic Action Group**

It was agreed to invite a representative from the EcAG to a future meeting to discuss the priorities the group wishes to focus on.

**SH/DM**

MS summed up the EnvAG's priorities as:

- Coastal change
- *Biological record centre*
- Access to green space
- Sustainable lifestyles – biomass, allotments etc
- Redundant farm buildings – GC reported that Edward Bent from the Haven Gateway Partnership has written a report on this.

## **8 AOB**

JB proposed that renewable energy be a future item on the agenda. RR reported that three planning applications have been put in for photovoltaic panels in Maldon. RW was concerned that the Government had underestimated the number of applications for photovoltaic cells in response to FITs (Feed-in Tariffs). Around 300 applications were made around the country but there is not enough funding available for all, therefore the

FIT will be reduced to a third of what it was.

MS reported that Nicky Spurr, Coastal Officer at ECC, is setting up a coastal forum with European funding over the next three years. The forum will be open to all stakeholders to develop and take forward an action plan to address the variety of problems facing the whole of the Essex coast. Some examples of initiatives to consider are beach warden schemes (litter picking, bird watch surveys etc) and sea defences.

**8.1 Date of next meeting**

DM will circulate dates

**DM**

**The meeting closed at 11.30am**