



Economic Action Group

Friday 21st May 2010, commencing at 10.00 am

RCCE Offices, Threshelfords Business Park, Feering CO5 9SE

MINUTES

Present:

Keith Brown
John Buchanan
Petra Crees

Lloyd Felton
Suzanne Harris (Minutes)
Keith Hughes

Phil Smith
Paul Williams
Philip Wilson (Chair)

1 **Welcome & Apologies**

Apologies had been received from:

Fiona Bryant, Lauren Harris, Edwin Jones, Zoe Myddleton, Dominic Petre

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting:** 22 January 2010

Accuracy and Matters Arising

The majority of the previous meeting had been led by Andrew Fieldsend and had focussed on the 'RuralJobs' project. As a result the notes referred to were those relating to 'RuralJobs' and there were no matters arising not already on the agenda.

3 **Broadband in Essex**

3.1 Progress so far

Essex County Council were working on 4 separate projects/objectives:

i. **Lobbying**

ECC were lobbying BT to use fibre cabling wherever possible. BT intends to have fibre in place by 2025, but lobbying could help to achieve this sooner; it will not, however, apply to remote rural areas.

ii. **Maldon Pilot**

This project involves placing the infrastructure and 'seeing what happens'. In the first 10 days over 200 enquiries were received

from business users in Maldon, including some IT-based businesses who would pass a knock-on benefit to their customers. This scheme was due to be switched on in June 2010. Buzzcom are working with Essex and Suffolk Water and Viola to place antennae. KB asked how success would be measured. PW responded, by lack of need for alternative measures.

iii. Community-Led

This will most likely involve a wireless solution. See item 3.2.

iv. ECC Infrastructure

This could include providing secure access to existing infrastructure, such as that in place to provide school internet connections.

3.2 Future activities

Philip Wilson introduced Lloyd Felton to the Group.

Lloyd explained that currently the only route for complaints re internet connections and speed is via the Internet Service Provider (ISP); however, much of the problem is infrastructure-based. Lloyd is approaching the problem by contacting each parish. A Rural Broadband Partnership has been developed, separate from Lloyd's own business, County Broadband. 25 parishes have so far been connected to a new system, thereby improving their connectivity. This system uses the same technology as the Maldon pilot. The aim and intention is to engage with every parish in Essex. There is talk that the Rural Broadband Partnership could be viewed as a national good practice project.

A parish survey is being launched in EALC's publication asking if clerks are 'aware of issues in their own parish', with response options 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

The intention of this community-led approach is to provide for the 'final ½' first and then backfill the gap of need.

Discussions are taking place with Adnams regarding using pubs as broadband hubs.

KH commented that he had not received any information about this – he is a Parish Councillor in an Essex parish. LF would be happy to receive advice on how to ensure the message gets out.

LF/PhW

SH

SH offered to circulate an electronic version of the survey (if available) to RCCE contacts. KB offered to do likewise to FB contacts.

KB

KH asked if there was a requirement to adhere to any geographic boundaries. There are no geographic boundaries in place for the project.

PhW commented that many rural businesses are small and employ local people; a business survey would also help to spread the message. It was recognised that there is a need to reach those small entities who

may not belong or subscribe to any organisations.

It was noted that EEDA do not wish to support this approach as they are still supporting Erebus, and do not wish to enter a situation with conflict of interest.

PaW suggested that ECC vehicles (such as library busses and Business Advice Service) could carry information. Lloyd confirmed that he was hoping for publicity opportunities via ECC.

It was suggested that a survey to schools could be useful, as children are now expected to have access to the internet for homework.

PhW referred to the Maldon/Buzzcom project and advised that 5 pubs had now been connected. All residents within 100metres of these 5 would be receiving a voucher entitling them to ½ free surfing time, with the aim of demonstrating the capabilities of the new service.

PhW recognised that there is a need for further lobbying. For this, we must do more to identify the need and where it is greatest.

The Maldon pilot would be reviewed and evaluated in due course.

4 Economic Action Group Work Plan

PhW

Autumn – it was proposed to meet and discuss issues arising post-election. PhW would endeavour to make available an ECC assessment of the impact in Essex of the coalition Government and its policies.

JBu

JBu agreed to look at the impact on local councils.

SH

SH would circulate potential dates for this meeting.

LF would like to be invited to future meetings.

5 AOB

- Reports from Meetings/Conferences attended
PaW had attended the Essex Multi-Agency Forum (MAF) – please contact direct for more info.
JBu, SH and PhW had attended the EERF on 3 March – please contact direct for more info. Papers available at www.eerf.org.uk
- Forthcoming Events
28 June – FSB briefing at House of Commons – info available from KB
- Date of Next Meeting
Dates to be circulated

Close of meeting