



Environmental Action Group
Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd April 2010
 10.00 am, RCCE Offices, Feering.

Present:

AM	Andy	May	EWT
LA	Lindsey	Allen	Forestry Commission
PB	Peter	Baggott	EALC
JB	Canon John	Brown	ERP Vice Chair
GC	George	Courtauld	RCCE
AG	Adrian	Gascoyne	ECC
LH	Lauren	Harris	Maldon District Council
SH	Suzanne	Harris	RCCE
MI	Mark	Iley	Essex Biodiversity Project
TI	Tim	Isaac	CLA
RP	Rosemary	Padfield	NFU
RR	Roy	Read	Maldon District Council
MSa	Mike	Sandison	Geo-Essex
MS	Matthew	Searle	ECC
GS	Geoff	Sinclair	Woodland Trust
ASJ	Andrew	St Joseph	Managing Coastal Change

In Attendance

KM	Kirsty	Monk	Rural Community Council of Essex
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Apologies

BT	Brenda	Towle	ECVYS
JH	John	Hall	ENVAG CHAIR / EWT
GU	Graham	Underwood	Essex University
AM	Alan	Morgan	Sustrans
TB	Ted	Benton	Essex University
KT	Karen	Thomas	Environment Agency
JC	Jim	Collins	Ashlyns Organics

Welcome and Introductions

Act:

SH explained that due to the airport and flights chaos caused by the volcanic ash cloud the ENVAG Chair John Hall had unfortunately been prevented from attending today and sent his sincere apologies. Andy May from EWT had kindly stepped in to the role of Chair for this initial meeting of the Environmental Action Group.

Introductions were made by those attending the meeting.

Apologies were taken as read. (Please see above for details).

AM thanked all for attending and asked SH to give a brief overview of the Essex Rural Partnership and background to the ERP Environmental Action Group.

Context and Background - Essex Rural Partnership and the Environmental Action Group

SH advised that the original ERP Environmental Group had not been well attended, partly due to duplication of work with other groups, and partly due to lack of leadership. The most recent Environmental Action Group had come into being through the merger of the Environment Task Group of the Essex Partnership with the Environment Action Group of the Essex Rural Partnership in February 2006; at the time it was felt that this merger would bring together two groups with similar objectives to form one effective body to take forward the environmental issues of both the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Essex Rural Strategy. This decision was taken shortly before RCCE took over management of the Essex Rural Partnership in April 2006.

By 2009 it was felt that the merged group was no longer a successful solution – in part because the introduction of the LAA had changed the Essex Partnership structure, and the needs from this side of the group. The launch of the new Essex Rural Strategy provided an ideal opportunity for a re-launch of an ERP Environmental Action Group (EnvAG). It was very welcome news that John Hall of EWT had agreed to Chair this group.

Aims of the Environmental Action Group

SH explained that the ERP does not have a working budget to deliver projects; the hope for the re-launched EnvAG group was to share issues, partnership working, lobbying and working towards Essex Rural Strategy (ERS) environmental priority delivery, with a focus on County specific issues. If a need for funding a particular partnership project were to arise from this group then funding could be sought.

MI felt that the ERS priorities covered a broad remit and it was important to consider how and where the group could add value.

GS added that members of the group could help tease out and narrow the specific issues of concern that they could work together on.

MS felt that the ERP ERS linked in closely with the Essex Rural Commission Report - which was tied into ECC funding.

GC felt that the brief should be to assess, advise and delegate – it was a broad vision and needed to be linked in with other organisations.

PB asked whether the question should be “What can this group do to communicate the rural environmental message?” Perhaps the strength of the group was that it brought together environmental specialists with other types of organisations with a broader remit such as the Essex Association of Local Councils and Rural Community Council of Essex and the group could tap into and use their networks as a resource to get the message out there.

EnvAG Draft Terms of Reference

The Group reviewed the proposed Terms of Reference (TOR) and the following amendments were proposed

- Frequency of meetings -revise from 6 to “4 to 6 meetings per year”.
- Election of an EnvAG Vice Chair in addition to election of the EnvAG Chair should be included.
- The Group discussed whether we should have reference to an EnvAG Action Plan as such within the TOR , “identify and deliver environmental priorities” was discussed as one option of an alternative phrasing

Action: KM to make suggested amendments and circulate the new draft TOR for review and feedback by the Group.

KM

Key Targets - What needs to happen?

The Group held a discussion to review potential priorities tasks and key issues/partners that they felt were important. It was decided that the priorities should be circulated by email to

EnvAG members for further consideration, to identify tasks and to vote for their top 3 priorities.

Action: KM to email document to group and pull together comments and votes for the next EnvAG meeting KM

Action: KM to circulate list of organisations previously invited to attend EnvAG KM

Action: MS to make contact with British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to see if they would like to join the group MS

Action: follow up Farming Wildlife Advisory Group invitation to join EnvAG. KM/JH

Access to Natural Green Space

MI explained that in some Districts and Boroughs in Essex there was limited access to rural green space, Essex Wildlife Trust had carried out an analysis of accessible green space provision in Essex- they used the Natural England's Access to Natural Green Space Guidelines (ANGST). MI explained that it was primarily concerned with people's physical access to natural green space near the place they lived.

N.B.: The ANGST standards recommend that people should have:

- *an accessible natural green space of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes walk) from home;*
- *at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilo metres of home;*
- *one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home;*
- *one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilo metres of home.*
- *In addition it proposes statutory Local Nature Reserves at a minimum level of one hectare per thousand populations.*

RP felt that with regard to public rights of way- the public were often not aware of the rules and trespass by members of the public was a difficult issue for farmers and land owners. For example the farmer could lose monies awarded in respect of HLS and ELS schemes if members of the public were spotted walking on the environmental strips bordering fields.

MSa added that trespass was also an issue for wildlife reserves.

PB felt that it would be useful to have a plain English guide to the Countryside Rights of Way- perhaps a "one sider" to help educate.

Action: EWT analysis of accessible green space provision in Essex to be circulated to the Group MI/KM

Action: Summary of Countryside Public Rights of Way to be circulated to the group MI/KM

Action: Add Access to Natural Green Space to the next EnvAG Agenda. JH/KM

The Essex Coast

Managing Coastal Change (MCC) Report

(A copy of the report's executive summary and toolkit information was circulated to those present)

ASJ reported that there were approximately 200 coastal farms in Essex all of which were very different, he felt the thing they lacked most was inspirational leadership from the environmental sector and that local support and engagement along with local knowledge was key to future working.

The MCC report aimed to promote and enable change in land management on the Essex coast by providing groups of land managers with the tools they need to adapt to climate change. The main focus of the project was to work with farmers to find out what they needed to adapt to the changes happening to the coast in the future and to help fill in the gaps in communication.

Further funding for MCC had been secured to look at a toolkit for farmers and work on emergency planning in response to surge tides. It was important to engender a feeling of pride amongst farmers as protectors of the countryside.

Coastal realignment on preferred sites was not an easy option as the Environment Agency do not own the sea defences and needed to work with the land owners.

Action: Circulate a copy of the flood maps to the Group

KM

Shoreline Management Plans for Essex

(Copies of the 3 part Shoreline Management Plans and EPOCH maps were circulated to those present at the meeting).

The Group held a brief discussion on the Shoreline Management Plan and the current consultation and potential issues concerning rural communities facing managed realignment or no active intervention to manage sea defences. The group felt it was important go away and to review the documents and to add this item to the next meetings agenda.

GC highlighted the problems faces by Harwich in future.

SH advised that she had details of public consultation events currently being held in Essex if members would like further information please contact herself or Kirsty.

SH advised that the SMP would be the subject of the next full ERP partnership Meeting in July (29th July, Maldon Town FC, 9.30am Registration, Meeting Commences 10.00am to 1.15 pm followed by buffet lunch) although this meeting would take place after the current SMP consultation process had ended.

Action: Add SMP to the next EnvAG Meeting Agenda

JH/KM

Action: 3 further missing SMP appendices to be circulated *–(please note that the afore mentioned appendices have been held back by the Environment Agency due to purdah and will be circulated after the General Election).*

KM

Woodland Creation in Essex

GS reported on the work of the Woodland Trust and the tree planting schemes it ran last year with over 131,000 trees planted. This year amongst other projects, the Trust has an acre in a box scheme. GS was interested in developing partnership working on future projects as small-scale projects when added together could make a real difference.

GC explained that landowners had been encouraged to produce woodlands to produce biomass fuel – however the cost of transporting the product by road was prohibitive.

LA gave an example of good practice in Suffolk, where woodlands can be used economically to produce fuel for local schools that use biomass boilers – cutting transport costs; she felt that there might be market for this type of production in Essex linking in with local schools.

MS reported that Stansted had a large wood burner and was currently importing its fuel from outside of Essex – this was a lost opportunity for Essex producers. Essex thatchers were also currently importing hazel from outside of Essex.

Action: Look at woodlands creation and economic potential of woodlands greater detail at future ERP meeting.

JH/GS/KM

County Records Centre

AM reported that a pilot records scheme in partnership with Tendring District Council and the Environment Agency with the support of Essex County Council has just been started and he would keep the group posted on its success. The pilot aims to track information such as wildlife data and protected species data. The records/data in this pilot study will be primarily used by planners when considering planning applications.

MS said that the pilot records scheme in Tendring was viewed as a starting point to build upon and grow the scheme further for wider use.

MSa commented that the geological records of Essex were proceeding well.

GS felt that accurate records and mapping could potentially help draw in funding to Essex.

Action: AM to feed back progress on the pilot study in Tendring to the group.

AM

Agri-environmental Schemes in Essex

AM asked if the funding pot for HLS schemes had a limit if there was a large take up of the scheme.

AG advised that he understood there was a limit to the HLS monies available, if there was a large uptake of the scheme.

Local Wildlife Sites and Living Landscapes

AM explained that work was currently being undertaken with Jules Pretty to work out away of putting an economic value on the benefits provided by wild life sites and eco systems.

(N.B. Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are areas of land with significant wildlife value. For example, an area of ancient woodland, a flower-rich hay meadow or a village pond.

There are about 1600 LoWS designated throughout Essex and together with nationally and internationally statutory protected areas, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), they represent the best areas for wildlife in the County)

LoWS are currently one of the Local Area Agreement Indicators – National Indicator NI197 and we are on target to get 530 of these in to Positive Conservation management by 31/3/011

Living Landscapes

“Living Landscapes are large areas of the countryside like river valleys, forested ridges, whole estuaries or diverse mosaics of grasslands, hedgerows and heaths. The vision of Living Landscapes is to bring these fragmented landscapes back to life; to work with a wide range of owners and partners so that these important areas can function as a whole so they benefit both wildlife and the people who live there. Essex Wildlife Trust has mapped 80 Living Landscape areas across Essex” - (extracts taken from the EWT website)

Living Landscapes are also one of the current Local Area Agreement Indicators in Essex – Local Indicator 10.1 and we are on target to get Vision Documents completed fro 28 Living Landscapes by 31/3/2011)

Essex Biodiversity Project (EBP)

MI advised that he worked with Parish and Town Councils and could provide advice and information regarding biodiversity, to help protect, conserve and enhance the variety of wildlife species and habitats in Essex...

Action: Circulate papers on:

- Essex Biodiversity Project
- Sites of Specific Scientific Interest
- Living Landscapes and Local Wildlife Sites
- Put the above items on next agenda.

KM/MI/JH

AOB

Funding

MS advised that there were small pockets of funding available that may be of use to landowners.

RP felt that being aware of potential funding was vital to landowners; perhaps the ERP networks could be used to circulate funding information.

Essex Woodlands Strategy

MS reported that Brian Stacey from ECC had produced the Essex Woodlands Strategy; he hoped it would be adopted/supported by this group.

Action: MS to circulate the Strategy to the Group.

MS/KM

Date and Time of Next EnvAG Meeting

Action: KM to liaise with JH/SH circulate possible EnvAG meeting dates to the Group

KM/JH/SH

ERP full partnership meeting to be held on 29th July, Maldon Football Club, 9.30am registration, meeting commences 10.00am – 1.15pm followed by buffet lunch – theme Shoreline Management Plan

Meeting concluded 12.30 pm