

East of England Rural Forum

Friday 12th December 2008

Woolpit Village Hall, Woolpit, Suffolk, IP30 9QX



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Minutes

Attendees

Lesley Anderson
Kate Belinis
Andrew Budden
Lesley Cowlan
John Goodwin
Suzanne Harris
Sally Hewitt
Peter Medhurst
Suzanne Pearson
Judith Watson
Richard Woolley

John Barker
Diana Bradley
John Carrick
Kevin Davis
Jilly Hall
Brian Hayes
Pat Holtom
John Mullen
Emma Powlett
Hazel Williams
John Yates

Francis Bedding
Fiona Bryant
Martin Collison
Jim Gledhill
Anne-Marie Hamilton
Graham Hedger
Corrine Meakins
Mick Page
Sarah Prentice
Cindy Winn

Apologies

David Burch
Ed Gregory
Sarah Hughes
Paul Wilkinson

Jonathan Burney
Philip Hayes
Stuart Pile
Sally Williams

Henry Cordeaux
John Howley
Mike Seville

Speakers

Nicola Lloyd, Commission for Rural Communities
Jasmine Joolia, Rural Action East
John Day, MENTER
Gavin Hodge, Suffolk ACRE

Welcome and Matters Arising

John Yates welcomed everyone to the meeting especially new members. He also introduced Emma Powlett, the EERF Co-ordinator. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed. All actions from the previous minutes have been completed.

Report back from the Rural Chairs meeting with the Minister

John met with new Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies and was impressed with the Ministers depth of understanding of rural matters. Huw Irranca-Davies has a rural constituency in Wales.

2. Questions from floor on the written reports from the Sub Groups

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Written Reports from the Sub Groups were circulated to the members prior to the meeting. No questions were raised from the floor for any of the Reports.

3. “Looking Forward”

John reminded the Forum of the need to keep rural issues on the government’s agenda e.g. rural proofing Local Area Agreements. The Forum also needs to enhance its engagement with EEDA, EERA and the Regional Minister. All agreed that quarterly meetings would continue.

Annual Conference

The proposed theme of the annual conference “The impact of the downturn of the economy in rural communities” was agreed.

The issues suggested for discussion are:

- Transport – Fuel
- Food
- Health
- Housing
- Skills/Education
- Enterprise

John noted that the Sustainable Growth Paper has already started to address some of these issues particularly Skills/Education and Enterprise.

Action Plan 09/10

John reminded the Forum members of the dates of Rural Forum meetings up to March 2010.

These are:

4th March 2009 – Annual Conference “The impact of the downturn of the economy in rural communities”
18th March 2009 – Land Use and Local Food
10th June 2009
16th September 2009
9th December 2009
3rd March 2010 – Annual Conference
17th March 2010 – RDPE follow up

Topics suggested for the June, September and December 2009 meetings are:

June or Dec – Health e.g. access to services and sport, aging population, LINKS
September – follow up from Annual Conference
June or Dec – Transport/Access e.g. access to green spaces, environmental issues.

ACTION: Rural Forum members to take back proposed topics to their organisations and discuss and feedback any comments to Emma Powlett by 23rd January 2009.

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Sustainable Rural Growth Position Paper update – Martin Collison

Martin Collison gave a brief update of the Sustainable Rural Growth Paper. The Forum approved the final version of the Growth Paper.

Martin highlighted the key points including:

- A strong economy.
- A successful community in which to live.
- An attractive and better environment

Underpinned by a commitment to:

- Good communication systems
- Active community engagement

The presentation notes and final version of the Paper will be circulated to the Forum.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate the final version of the Sustainable Rural Growth Paper and the presentation notes to the Forum.

Skills research: Train to Gain

Many people who live in rural areas already have good skills but need re-training to gain a new or better job. Firms are not in a position to co fund training of their staff due to the current economic downturn. Issues will be raised with appropriate Minister. A letter is being prepared to send to the Minister together with the Growth Paper.

ACTION: Martin Collison to draft a letter for John Yates to be sent with the Sustainable Rural Growth Paper to the Minister.

Inward Investment position paper

An overview of the Inward Investment Report has now been completed. The Forum endorsed the recommendations in the report overview and agreed that it should be circulated to EEDA, appropriate Ministers and the Forum as soon as possible.

ACTION: Secretariat to forward the Inward Investment Report EEDA, Ministers and the Forum.

Social Inclusion

The topic of this Rural Forum meeting is Social Inclusion. The East of England has known pockets of rural deprivation e.g. Brecklands. Deprivation can also be hidden in areas of affluence. How can we reach these people and in what form can we help them?

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4. Introduction – Andrew Budden

Andrew welcomed the Forum members, speakers and guests to Woolpit Village Hall and introduced the first speaker.

5. Deprivation Report for Norfolk and Suffolk – Nicola Lloyd, Director of Analysis, Commission for Rural Communities

Nicola Lloyd gave an update on how the Commission is measuring deprivation in rural areas.

The latest State of the Countryside Bulletin “State of the Countryside Update 5: Rural analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation - 2007” has just been published on the CRC website.

Tom Smith of the Oxford Centre for Social Inclusion (OCSI) presented a report on measuring deprivation in England to a conference organised by CRC and Communities and Local Government on 5th December.

CRC have developed a method of measuring very small areas of deprivation.

- National scale for measuring deprivation is 1,500 people.
- Smaller areas defined as 300 people. This picks out smaller pockets of deprivation in wider areas.
- Rural deprivation is dispersed more widely in smaller pockets than urban deprivation.
- National indices do not show up deprivation in rural areas.
- 70% of overall deprivation to be found in rural areas accord to new measuring method.

EU Report on Poverty and Social Inclusion in Rural Areas has recently been published.

- CRC are putting together a national report for Ministers.
- CRC have identified “hot spots” of deprivation in affluent areas.
- CRC will use this information to conduct in depth research about people living in poverty in affluent areas.
- The report will include human stories about living in poor areas and use real income data
- CRC and Rural Forum need to work together to ensure that assistance for deprived areas are targeted appropriately.

ACTION: Nicola Lloyd to forward the national report for Ministers to John Yates and Emma Powlett once it has been completed.

ACTION: Secretariat to forward links to the State of the Countryside Bulletin and OCSI Report to the Forum.

6. Rural Services Survey – Jasmine Joolia, Rural Action East

Rural Action East is the umbrella organisation for the Rural Community Councils in the region. Beds RCC, Cambs ACRE, RCCE, Norfolk RCC and Suffolk ACRE have all contributed data to the

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Rural Services Survey.

The survey was sent to Parishes with population less than 10,000. The response rate was 73% which is very good.

The survey focussed on the following topics

- Post Offices
- Shops
- Banks/Building Societies
- Pubs/Hotels/Restaurants
- Transport
- Housing
- Meeting Places/Amenities

Findings include:

Post Offices

There was a decline in parishes with access to a post office or postal service from 54% in 2000 to 43% in 2008

Shops

Farmers Markets and mobile shops were not counted as a permanent shopping facility for this survey.

49% of parishes have access to a shop or retail outlet. Regionally, there has been a decline but Bedfordshire and Essex have increased the number of shops.

Banks/Building Societies

The number of parishes with access to Bank facilities is 42%.

Pubs/restaurants/hotels

68% of parishes have access in region. Increase in these services shown in Suffolk.

Decline in pubs from 83% (2000) to 68% (2008) due to economic climate and people staying at home

Transport – National and community buses

42% is the regional average for access. Decline shown in national bus service provision.

Community bus services plug the gaps.

Affordable Housing

In the region there is a 26% rate of provision for affordable housing.

Meeting places/amenities/organisations

Organisations such as bridge clubs and keep fit classes need meeting places or amenities to function well.

Survey shows an overall increase in facilities in the region but Bedfordshire shows a decrease.

Access to Health facilities and Schools/Skills

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Information in these areas was gathered in a different way to the survey. These results will be looked at separately.

Andrew Budden noted that Woolpit is a large village that is ideally situated closed to the A14 with many facilities and some new affordable housing provision. Other smaller villages further away do not enjoy the same level of access.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate Jasmine Joolia's presentation to the Forum.

7. Travellers – John Day, MENTER

Gypsy and Traveller accommodation site needs identified as part of Regional Housing Survey. There are 4,500 new pitches required across England and Wales by 2011. Approx 1,100 of these pitches required in the East of England.

EERA submitted a Gypsy and Traveller Draft Policy document to the Secretary of State (CLG) on 15th February 2008.

The new policy requires local authorities to build legal sites.

Within the travellers community those aged less than 24 years and over 60 are most in need of accommodation

A significant number of sites are to be built in rural areas.

The main concern of gypsies and travellers is negative public opinion.

John Day has carried out a scoping exercise with local authorities.

He contacted 17 local authorities to find out who the lead person on site provision is, and which department is responsible for gypsy and traveller issues. Only two authorities responded.

Local authorities are expected to provide sites but most have not yet prepared for this new policy. Problems expected due to sites being earmarked in green belt land and near villages.

Questions and comments were raised around illegal encampments and mess.

Need to distance law abiding travellers from less law abiding travellers.

Law abiding travellers suffer from the actions of the lawless travellers.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate John Day's presentation to the Forum.

8. Local volunteers – Gavin Hodge, Suffolk ACRE

Gavin noted that some volunteers contribute regularly; others only when they can spare the time or are needed.

- Charities rely on volunteers. Suffolk ACRE is a charity.
- In Suffolk, rural transport provision is patchy. Volunteers and community buses plug the gap.
- There are 28 community transport schemes in Suffolk. Suffolk ACRE provides 3 of these schemes.

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- There is also a Dial-a-Ride scheme in Ipswich.
- Volunteers need to be recognised by local authorities and central government.
- Suffolk ACRE has enabled 22 Parish Plans to be completed.
- Volunteers will also be needed to take actions from the Parish Plans forward.

Good Neighbour Scheme

- The Good Neighbour Scheme was launched in 2003 and there are 550 volunteers in Suffolk.
- The scheme enables people to live in their own homes for longer.
- Idea is to match requests for assistance to an appropriate volunteer provider.
- Requests include lifts to the shops/doctors, minor repairs, form filling, looking after pets.
- Lifts are the most requested service.

The BBC One Show filmed a Good Neighbour Scheme locally. This resulted in lots of enquiries and Pembrokeshire authority is now modelling their scheme on Suffolk ACRE. The scheme has been going for 5 years so far. Barriers to the scheme include hesitancy in asking for help initially.

Volunteers are often recently retired people or those available during the day. Suffolk is popular place for retirement with high life expectancy but has pockets of deprivation. Suffolk currently has 98,000 family carers mostly people looking after elderly parents.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate Gavin Hodge's presentation notes to the Forum.

9. Q & A Session with Panel of Speakers

What is the solution to the problems of deprived areas?

- a. Development and regeneration needed including creating employment and skills provision in rural areas.
- b. Support for families on low income particularly seasonal workers.

How do we get services to people in rural areas and identify the people most in need?

- a. Good Neighbour Scheme could identify some of those in need.
- b. Need to define deprivation and people in need.
- c. Young people in rural areas have difficulties accessing services as well as old people
- d. Income deprivation is defined as household with less than £14,000 per year.
- e. Travellers – District Councils need to work together to provide sites rather than against each other by pushing problem into neighbouring District.
- f. Volunteers not always older people. Older people look after elderly and younger volunteers help with play groups and youth football.
- g. Rural areas have put up with lack of facilities for longer compared to urban areas.
- h. Volunteer organisations need to persuade EEDA and EERA that without proper data they won't reach the right people in need.
- i. Provide more Rural Support Groups e.g. Rural Support Group for Farmers.
- j. Loss of Post Office, Pubs and shops. Need a population of at least 1,000 people to sustain

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- a shop.
- k. Successful villages are usually larger villages. Need to target smaller areas of deprivation.
- l. Most job growth is aimed at bigger centres. Need to attract more jobs to rural areas for local people.
- m. Rural jobs can reduce carbon footprint as there is potential for less commuting.
- n. Fuel Poverty - may affect volunteer service provision.
- o. Funding to get people into work particularly younger people into local jobs and get them more involved in local community.

10. Summary and Close

There is deprivation in rural areas usually in small pockets spread over large areas. Community facilities and help exist but need more financial support.

Volunteers – support and promote schemes such as Good Neighbour Schemes across the region.

Potential Outcomes and Actions

- Support CRC work on measuring Deprivation
- Support Rural Services Survey – develop further to pull together a report that paints a picture of the East of England.
- Look at how Leader funding via RDPE will support these issues

11. Date and Venue of next EERF meeting

Annual Conference on 4th March 2009 at Lavenham Village Hall, Suffolk
Rural Forum AGM on 18th March. Venue to be confirmed

Diana Bradley
Secretariat
16th December 2008