

# East of England Rural Forum

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Ely Beet Sports and Social Club, Lynn Road, Ely,  
Cambs, CB6 1DD



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### Minutes

#### Attendees

John Barker  
Andrew Budden  
Rachel Carrington  
Anne-Marie Hamilton  
Sarah Hughes  
John Mullen  
Suzanne Roast  
Karen Staples  
Sally Williams  
John Yates  
Sarah Prentice

Ed Bennett  
Jane Burch  
Martin Collison  
Brian Hayes  
Corinne Meakins  
Jim Page  
Steve Scott  
Paul Wilkinson  
Philip Wilson  
Diana Bradley  
Lisa Roberts

Phil Brown  
John Carrick  
John Day  
Graham Hedger  
Amanda Montague  
Stuart Pile  
Mike Seville  
Hazel Williams  
Richard Woolley  
Stuart Crowgey

#### Apologies

Kate Belinis  
Marie Francis  
Jason Groco  
Lord Iveagh  
Peter Medhurst

Cllr. Henry Cordeaux  
John Goodwin  
Philip Hayes  
Ann Lovesey  
Mick Page

Pam Forbes  
Ed Gregory  
Pat Holtom  
Greg Luton  
Mike Render

#### Speakers

Mike Spicer, EEDA  
John Sheppard, Birkbeck College  
Richard Crozier, GO-East

### 1. Introduction

John Yates welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reminded the EERF that 'Growth' had been identified as an important topic with the emphasis on discussing appropriate growth and ways in which rural can benefit. The outcome of the meeting will be that a Position Paper is produced.

John reported that the meeting was due to have included a presentation on Ely's Masterplan and an associated site visit. However, legal difficulties with the Masterplan meant that it was not possible for this session to take place.

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## 2. An overview of the Growth Agenda (Mike Spicer, EEDA)

Mike Spicer gave a high-level overview of growth focussed around the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) that had recently been submitted to Government. A copy of the presentation will be circulated with the minutes.

Mike advised that the RES is not an urban-focused strategy and that it has a goal around geography and growth in rural and coastal areas.

A joint RES and Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Implementation Plan will be developed over the coming nine months. This will include a sustainability appraisal and a rural proofing strand.

A discussion followed, during which the following points were raised:

- Rural areas are becoming increasingly service based. The meaning of interdependence between rural and urban areas needs to be clear that it is no longer about growing urban centres vs. rural hinterlands.
- The joint Implementation Plan will distinguish between places; and the RES is more geographically specific than previously.

## 3. Study on the Economic Relationships and Flows between Urban and Rural Communities (John Sheppard, Birkbeck College)

John Sheppard gave a presentation about research that he has carried out to look at economic flows and how the regional economy works. A copy of the presentation will be circulated with the minutes.

John made the following points:

- Over 70% of people in rural areas work outside of a 'travel to work' area. This distorts the figures and the placement of affordable housing.
- Expansion in rural areas needs to be sympathetic and high quality.
- It is possible that people are commuting out of rural areas because they are priced out of villages, however more research on this is needed.

## 4. Regional Spatial Strategy (Richard Crozier, GO-East)

Richard Crozier gave a presentation on the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which has recently been published. Copies of the RSS were available for EERF members. A copy of the presentation will be circulated with the minutes.

Richard reported that the EERF's route into influencing policy will be through Local Development Documents (LDDs) and the partial review of the RSS which is due to be completed by 2011.

'Rural' is a central part of the RSS although it doesn't appear specifically as the needs of rural areas are the same as for the region as a whole.

The following points were made during discussion:

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- There are a number of credibility issues with the RSS. There are issues with the current economic climate, affordable housing etc. but in the longer term the issues will still need to be addressed.
- EERA had withdrawn its support for the RSS but the Chair is now broadly supportive and ready to implement it.
- Local Authority Forums are part of the SNR consultation process – making them democratic is an issue.
- The small number of policies that will be reviewed as part of the partial review of the RSS will probably only be those relating to housing and planning. Environmental policies will need to be strengthened at the same time to ensure that the RSS is sustainable.
- Costs are rising in the construction industry and this will constrain what can realistically happen over the next five years. However, there is a need to ensure that the issue of affordable housing provision is addressed.

## 5. Workshop Sessions – 'Positive Growth'

Sally Williams and Martin Collison had put together a workshop session to look at positive growth in a rural context, based on a model developed by Regional Cities East. The EERF split into two groups and discussed the following questions:

- What factors make a rural settlement successful and therefore likely to grow in a sustainable way?
- How is growth managed in rural areas?
- How can growth work to support the aspirations of rural communities?

## 6. Feedback from Workshop Sessions and Summary

Each of the workshop groups presented the key points from their discussions.

### Group 1: Philip Wilson

#### Question 1:

- more power for parish councils
- good mix of smaller businesses
- mixture of outreach services and public / community transport
- high quality, sympathetic buildings
- the environmental side does not come through on the list

#### Question 2:

- growth is not managed very well in rural areas
- parish councils needs more expertise
- mentoring and clustering of parish councils
- rural communities are now transient in nature

#### Question 3:

- a single policy is not appropriate as we are a diverse region

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## Group 2: Paul Wilkinson

### Question 1:

- build on the diversity of settlements
- dynamism is important to future success
- attractiveness – recognise the built, historic and natural environment

### Question 2:

- too top-down and not enough bottom-up
- connectedness between town and village plans – there is a need for Local Authorities to engage at an earlier stage
- rural areas controlling their own destiny and being bought in to the growth agenda
- engage businesses in decision making

### Question 3:

- skills issue and identifying gaps
- business support and entrepreneurship
- deprived of the opportunity to develop because of the urban focus

The notes from the workshop groups will be pulled together and will form the basis for a Position Paper.

## **7. EERF General Business – Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed subject to the amendment that John Day be added to the attendance list. **Update:** this action has since been completed.

There were the following matters arising from the minutes:

Post Offices: the Essex approach is being seen as a pilot and negotiations are ongoing. Suzanne Roast asked EERF members if they are aware of a potential consultation on the Post Office Card Account and if they have any further information to pass it on to her.

Migrant workers paper: John Yates is still trying to obtain an electronic copy.

All other actions have been completed.

John drew the EERF's attention to the evaluation report produced by Emma Powlett following the last meeting. The report contains a number of recommendations that the EERF is already working to and communications in particular will be picked up by the Steering Group.

An email had gone out to all EERF members requesting their 'Burning Issues'. The purpose of this is to give EERF members the opportunity to raise issues for potential discussion at a future meeting, as well as for John to raise at regional and national level. There had been no 'Burning Issues' received prior to the meeting, however the following were raised at the meeting:

- County Rural Forums – it will be difficult for the EERF to operate without them.
- DCLG support at district council level to deal with the impact of the migration debate. Breckland will be the first in the country to receive this funding and it was agreed that Martin Collison will give an update at the next EERF meeting.

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## 8. Verbal Reports from the Sub-groups

### Learning and Skills

Martin Collison reported that there will be three events following the research on costs of learning provision in the rural parts of the region. Details of the events will be circulated to EERF members.

A major pilot will be ready for the autumn around Train to Gain and whether rural and smaller parts of the region are able to benefit.

**ACTION:** Martin Collison to send details of the learning provision events to Sarah Prentice for circulation to the EERF.

### Housing

Graham Hedger reported that the Sub-Group is looking at how to take forward the outcomes and recommendations from the conference and the EERF / CLA report into barriers to housing provision. This links to the Hastoe report that will be launched in September.

The loss of funding for Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) is causing problems. The Sub-Group has submitted a proposal to Rural Action East around ways to encourage Housing Associations to support RHEs.

### Market Towns East

John Mullen advised the EERF that Market Towns East now has a representative on Regional Cities East's Business and Economy Sub-Group. The University of Newcastle is undertaking research and there is potential for Market Towns East to feed into this. Some larger market towns are undertaking masterplanning activities and the Sub-Group is spreading good practice.

### SFFS

John Yates reported that Mick Carr, Secretary to the SFFS Groups, briefed him on food and fuel security prior to the RAF Chairs' meeting with the Minister. The SFFS Groups' intention is to start a debate in the region around food supply. There will be a conference in the region in the autumn to pick up on the outputs from the breakfast meetings being held at the county shows.

**ACTION:** Sarah Prentice to circulate the papers on food and fuel security to the EERF.

## 9. Report back from Chairs / Minister meeting 15<sup>th</sup> May

John Yates updated the EERF following the RAF Chairs' meeting with Minister. The Minister has agreed to write to RAFs regarding the Government's legislative programme. The Matthew Taylor review has made some likely recommendations and a report is due in July. The Rural Advocate's report has been published.

The next RAF Chair's meeting with the Minister will take place on 17<sup>th</sup> September. The Chairs will have a separate business meeting prior to this.

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## **10. AOB**

Jane Burch requested that the Regional Minister be invited to a future meeting to hear the EERF's views.

Sarah Prentice  
Secretariat  
17<sup>th</sup> June 2008