

East of England Rural Forum

Thursday 18th September 2008

Wyboston Lakes, Wyboston, Beds, MK44 3AL



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Wyboston Lakes, Great North Road, Wyboston, Beds, MK44 3AL

Minutes

Attendees

Francis Bedding
John Buchanan
Rachel Carrington
John Day
Ed Gregory
Philip Hayes
Edward Iveagh
Stuart Pile
David Thompson
Cindy Winn

Ed Bennett
Andrew Budden
Martin Collison
Johanna Davies
Anne-Marie Hamilton
Pat Holtom
Ann Lovesey
Sarah Prentice
Judith Watson
John Yates

Diana Bradley
David Burch
Stuart Crowgey
John Goodwin
Brian Hayes
Sarah Hughes
Peter Medhurst
Suzanne Roast
Sally Williams

Apologies

Lesley Anderson
Jane Burch
Pam Forbes
Greg Luton
Lisa Roberts
Paul Wilkinson

Kate Belinis
John Carrick
Graham Hedger
Corinne Meakins
Steve Scott
David Wood

Phil Bennett-Lloyd
Marie Francis
Nicola Lloyd
Mike Render
Mike Seville
Richard Woolley

Speakers

Mike King, Action for Market Towns
Ron Decelis, East of England International
Corrine Garbett, Huntingdonshire District Council

1. Introduction and general Regional Forum Business

John Yates welcomed everyone to the meeting. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed. All actions from the previous minutes have been completed.

RAF Chairs meeting with Minister

Concern was expressed over the considerable impact of rising fuel and heating costs on rural areas particularly early deaths and health problems for the elderly. The Government has recently announced a £1bn support package to assist householders with improving the energy efficiency of their homes. The Minister requested that RAF Chairs ask their RAF Members to make their networks and organisations aware that grants will be available. John asked the Forum to encourage people to claim for these grants.

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ACTION: John to circulate the information about the energy efficiency grants when it is received.

John highlighted the importance of the Forum responding to requests for information at Ministerial level. He thanked John Buchanan for his comments on Parish and Town Councils that fed into the consultation on the draft Legislative Framework.

ACTION: John to circulate comments from the other RAFs on rural proofing of Local Area Agreements and the draft Legislative Framework to the EERF.

The next RAF Chairs meeting with the Minister is on 14th November and the main agenda topic will be food and fuel security. John will seek comments from the Forum by email.

Comments/Feedback from the Forum:

Many similarities on what affects rural communities in each region.

Question. Does the Minister listen to feedback?

Answer. Yes he reads and notes comments.

Question: Affordable Housing – is schools provision considered when planning housing?

Answer. Yes it is.

Question. Regional Funding Allocation. Not enough money. Should the Rural Minister be influencing the Treasury to allocate more funding to rural areas, proportionately, than at present?

Answer. John asked Stuart Pile to write a note on this and he will circulate it to the Forum.

Question: Government may go to the polls in 18 months. Is the Forum engaging with rural spokespersons from the opposition parties?

Answer. Rural Forums will continue over the next 2 years. John is looking to meet with Jim Paice (Con) East Cambs MP in the near future. The Forum should continue to sound out and influence the opposition Rural Minister. Need to have discussions about rural regional issues with all Parties.

ACTION: Stuart Pile to write a note on the Regional Funding Allocation and circulate it to the Forum.

ACTION: John Yates to include feedback from the Chair / Minister meeting in the next Forum newsletter.

Burning Issues

John reminded the Forum that members are able to raise 'burning issues' for discussion at Forum meetings. These should be sent to the Secretariat in advance of meetings.

2. Presentation of Sustainable Growth Paper – Martin Collison

Martin Collison gave a presentation of the Sustainable Growth Paper. The key recommendation is that we need sustainable rather than random growth.

The presentation will be circulated to the Forum.

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

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- Depot Units are being used by heavy industry in rural areas. The infrastructure of small villages is not designed for heavy lorries that create traffic and noise. Operating Licences do not take this into account. Local Parish Councils could have more say in granting of Licences.
- Do we know enough about the economy of small settlements to be able to direct the right sort of investment and growth in these areas? Do they have more commuters with high level skills being used elsewhere rather than local people with lower skills? How can you match access to jobs to local need?
- Work flows are very complex. Job creation agenda needs to be broad and take account of transport links, affordable housing, schools etc.
- Encouraging more working at home is one option to reduce travel costs and car use.
- Newer incomers with higher wages and skills levels may have more say in local matters than more traditional dwellers. Need to be creative in design of new developments and jobs creation.

There is still time to make comments on the Sustainable Growth paper.

ACTION: Forum Members to send further comments to Martin Collison by 30th September 2008.

3. Situational Analysis – Sally Williams, Market Towns East

Sally Williams gave a presentation introducing the concept of inward investment in rural areas. A copy of the presentation will be circulated to the Forum.

Sally made the following points:

- There is a need to create jobs and grow the economy in rural areas.
- Regional Cities East concentrates on urban economy.
- 99% of businesses in region have less than 50 employees. ¼ estimated to be in rural areas.
- No proper tracking of the rural economy or rural businesses. Lack of data.
- What conditions do Market Towns need to attract inward investment?

Sally asked the Forum to consider 5 questions and comment on these:

- What type of investment do we want to attract?
- What is realistic?
- What do we have to provide to attract it?
- What do we have to do to attract it?
- What do we have to work with?

Sally also thanked the Forum for its sponsorship of the regional Market Town Awards. Walton-on-the-Naze in Essex has won the regional award and will be going forward to the national final.

4. Presentation of the Forum's Inward Investment Paper - Mike King, Market Towns East

Mike King gave a presentation on the Market Towns East Inward Investment Paper. A copy of the

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presentation will be circulated to the Forum.

Case studies have been carried out on four Market Town areas: Ely, St Neots, Wymondham and Howden (East Riding, Yorkshire) and a checklist of primary success factors has been produced.

Copies of the key findings of the paper and the checklist were handed out at the Forum meeting for comment.

Comments/Feedback:

Employment Land needs to be kept as long term employment development land and more needs to be identified and allocated.

Housing targets means Brownfield sites are being used for housing.

The paper concentrates on Market Towns rather than rural communities in general.

Danger of having one large investor creating jobs in a Market Town as people will become dependant on this one employer – there needs to be a balance of inward investment into an area. Hopefully one investor will attract other investors into the town as well.

Need to consult with economic development officers.

Paper needs to produce an ideal future situation scenario.

Need to tailor outcomes to our region based on the current inward investment situation.

A final report will be completed by Sally Williams and will be circulated to the Forum and Economic Development Officers for comment.

5. Attracting International Investment – Ron Decelis, East of England International

Ron Decelis gave a presentation on East of England International's work on Inward Investment and Trade. A copy of the presentation will be circulated to the Forum.

The following points were made in response to Members questions:

- In 2007 EEI helped to create 1457 jobs.
- The Government's value for each job is £20K

6. St Neots Inward Investment and the Creativexchange – Corrine Garbett, Huntingdonshire District Council

Corrine Garbett gave a presentation on St Neots Inward Investment and the newly built Creativexchange building.

Corrine made the following points:

- Huntingdonshire has had rapid housing growth over the past 30 years but not much employment growth.
- This has led to more people commuting to Peterborough, Cambridge and London
- Huntingdonshire District Council has made a strategy change to create high value jobs rather than distribution warehouse jobs as at present to attract people away from commuting.

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- Decided to encourage the Creative Industries sector.
- Commissioned a building on a St Neots college site for small creative industry businesses.
- The building is a sustainable design and has created 14 business units.

Questions/Comments

Question: Has Hunts District Council got land and funds for new investment opportunities in manufacturing and food production?

Answer. Yes have identified potential land for this.

Question: Is the new Centre going to be self funding?

Answer. Hopefully yes in future.

7. Date and venue of next EERF meeting

12th December 2008 Woolpit Village Hall, Suffolk - Agenda: Social Inclusion.

Diana Bradley
Secretariat
19th September 2008