



Wednesday 10th June 2009

Swaffham Assembly Rooms,
Market place,
Swaffham,
Norfolk PE37 7DQ

East of England Rural Forum

“Access”

Minutes

Attendees

John Buchanan	Suzanne Harris	Cllr Stuart Pile
Mick Carr	Philip Hayes	Mike Render
Martin Collison	Cindy Winn	Philip Wilson
Kevin Davis	Cllr Judith Watson	Chris Wood
Andrew Fisher	Pat Holtom	David Wood
Cllr John Goodwin	Jasmine Joolia	Richard Woolley
Jacque Grant	Peter Medhurst	John Yates
Brian Hayes	John Mullen	

Apologies

John Barker	Nicola Currie	John Howley
Kate Belinis	John Day	Sarah Hughes
Kirsten Bennett	Pam Forbes	Edward Iveagh
David Burch	Anne Marie Hamilton	David Thompson
John Carrick	Graham Hedger	Cllr Hazel Williams

Speakers

Andrew Fisher (EEDA)
David Lawrence (Easton College)

1. Welcome - John Yates

John Yates welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of meeting on 18 March 2009 were agreed as an accurate record.

John had attended event where CRC had launched their revised Rural Proofing Toolkit. This would be used by CRC for influencing national policy and government departments. However, CRC would require assistance from regional & local bodies such as the RAFs and RCCs to roll it out across the country. See <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/crc97ruralproofingtoolkit>

3. Report from RRAF Chairs' Minister meeting

John Yates fed back details from the RRAF Chairs' meeting with the rural affairs Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies on 14th May 2009. The main points of discussion were around:

- Rural economy and impact of the recession
- Banks lending to stimulate rural enterprise
- Broadband provision and quality

Other points discussed at this meeting were:

- The Matthew Taylor report and the response from government mostly in agreement with his recommendations leading to:
 - The appointment by CLG of 2 officers to work specifically on affordable housing in Homes and Communities Agency and
 - Competitive master-planning fund for towns which could benefit market towns.
- RDPE – how the achievements of the programme was measuring against what was promised.
- Regional ministers – access to and awareness of rural matters. The minister acknowledged the difficulty of RAFs engaging with regional ministers and would raise the matter with his colleagues.
- The re-launch of CRC's Rural proofing toolkit
- Presentation of a research report by Social Exclusion Unit on older people and social exclusion

The RRAF Chairs discussed amongst themselves the need to change the structure of their meetings. It was agreed that there would be value in the chairs having a separate business meeting to discuss their regions' issues and their role and to improve their preparation for a more structured meeting with the minister.

It was also noted that it was very important to engage with all political parties especially the shadow minister.

4. Written reports from Sub Groups

The EERF members noted the written reports from the Learning and Skills and Housing Sub-Groups that had been circulated prior to the meeting. While there were no questions on these reports, the point was made that investment in rural learning and skills must cover much more than land and agriculture.

Pat Holtom (chair of the inactive Market Town Subgroup) advised that the subgroup was moribund at moment with no funding and no major issues. However, this may change as priorities evolve and people move roles. Pat would continue to monitor the situation and assess if the sub group should reform.

5. News

Update on the new secretariat position

John gave formal thanks to GO-East for its work as secretariat and all it has done for the Forum. He advised that with effect from April, Rural Action East will be responsible for the administrative and support duties for the Forum.

EEDA Board

The Chairman, Richard Ellis, was stepping down and a replacement would be appointed by September 2009. Also, there were two vacancies for Board members with an interest in Trade Unions and education.

CRC

Following on from the Rural Advocate report on the rural economy, Summits were being arranged around the country. The next one was a joint EE and SE event on *Inspiration and Leadership* on 30 June at Waddesdon Manor.

Consultations

Communities and Local Government (CLG) had drafted a new Policy and Planning Statement, PPS 4, which was concerned with planning for prosperous communities. It was relevant to rural communities and the EERF would respond to the consultation.

6. “Access”

John introduced the session and handed over to Suzanne Harris to introduce the first group discussion.

Suzanne started the session setting the scene regarding access problems in rural areas. She highlighted that two solutions would be remote access to services by rural residents and out-reach of services to rural communities. Examples took many forms including (community) transport, clustering and multi-purpose centres. The Forum members then broke into groups to discuss and record their experiences of best practice and some practical solutions to access issues. See **Annex A** for flip-chart notes.

7. Joint Implementation Plan – Presentation by Andrew Fisher, EEDA

Andrew introduced the JIP as the way in which the plans of both the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) would be implemented in a coordinated way. It represented a high level business case for the region and would be used to request government investment in the East of England. The current consultation period would close on 3rd July after which the JIP would be re-drafted during September/October with the final version launched in November/December.

There was no explicit rural section in line with a policy of *mainstreaming*. The draft had approximately 67 delivery plans across the seven major themes. There was concern that there were too many and some rationalisation and consolidation of the plans would be sensible.

In the members' discussion, this point was picked up with a perception that there was a “silo” approach and inadequate integration across the major themes. The JIP should take note of the published EERF policy papers such as those on economy, skills and water. Other points raised by members were:

- That agreement on priorities and associated budgets across such a long time period could remove flexibility and prevent responses to and investment in emerging priorities.
- Water management must cover domestic, business and farming/agriculture.
- Business support must include and be effective for rural areas as well as urban.
- Response to climate change should integrate emerging county plans into the coherent regional plan
- There must be adequate support for social and environment priorities and not undue emphasis on economic
- Provision of land for affordable housing would be more available if there was recognition of an adequate return for land owners
- Given the mainstreaming approach, rigorous and effective rural proofing must be an integral part of the drafting process.

8. Top Ten EERF Issues for JIP

In small groups, the members discussed their key concerns that they would wish to see considered in the final JIP. In the feedback and discussion that followed, the members raised the following points:

- Broadband – wider access and higher quality for rural locations
- Houses – adequate provision of affordable homes for rural people
- Climate change and Green infrastructure
 - A broader and more integrated scope
 - Transport to embrace “travel” with integration and support for all modes (including walking and cycling) and all provision (public, private and community) at all levels (regional and local)
 - More understanding and consideration of the economic value of eco-systems
- Delivery – need for clearer linkage between regional strategy and local delivery especially

- in relation to LAA priorities and plans and community requirements
- Overall approach needed
 - Greater sharing of goals, outcomes and budgets to achieve them across public bodies
- Demographics – better analysis of the impact of an aging population and increasing number of single households
 - Larger change in rural where difficulties with access to health and social care, retail and financial services would be significant
 - Fuel poverty would affect rural households greater

ACTION: David Wood to respond to JIP consultation on behalf of EERF using discussion notes as basis for response.

9. Solutions to Access Problems

Returning to the main theme for the meeting, the members went back to their small groups to consider what should be done to improve access for rural communities and how should the Forum pursue these ideas. The output from the tables is listed in **Annex B**.

10. Easton College – Transport Solutions – David Lawrence

David explained the financial pressure on the college from changes to the student funding and fees formula. This led to the decision to consolidate teaching facilities onto the single site at Easton and so achieve economies of scale, increased efficiencies and improved quality of teaching. This had increased learners overall but while 16-18 year old student numbers had increased, +19 numbers had decreased. Also there was a trailing off in numbers after the initial few weeks of the academic year.

The causes were linked to increased travel distance required to reach Easton and the significant barrier of poor public transport - journey duration and infrequency of services.

In partnership with Norfolk CC, Easton College had invested significantly in buses and services. These provided faster, better scheduled services giving students shorter and more reliable journeys. The services were also timed to match the college time tabling enabling better use of resources by the college over a longer teaching day. As well as a financial investment, the college had to devote resources as a bus services operator and logistical problems associated with the arrival and departure of an increasing number of buses from the Easton site had to be overcome. Overall, the investment had been successful with student numbers increasing and being retained, college teaching increasing in quality and efficiency and increased income through increased student fees.

The success was achieved by working with NCC passenger travel unit to improve coordination of public services and shared use of buses by the public so everyone benefited. Other success factors included provision of local access services to connect with the college buses and coordination of timetables between Easton and City College Norwich.

11. Summary

John Yates thanked the speakers for their presentations and the members for their active contribution to the breakout sessions. The results would be written up and distributed with the minutes. The issue of access was a fundamental defining characteristic for rural communities and the Forum steering group would consider how to take the ideas forward.

David Wood and Mags Lambert
Rural Action East
July 2009

ANNEX A: Access – Issues/Solutions/Best Practice Examples

Table 1

- Kick Start – Norfolk for eg Young people, Training, Jobs, leisure – nationally taken forward
- Bus Link – Mobile Office Unit – takes services out to rural and market towns – car parks, supermarkets, shows and “diverse” areas
- Broadband
 - Equipping Suffolk libraries (mobile)
 - Gaps in the take up of online services risked creation social divide especially for (eg) parts of older population
 - Rural incomplete coverage and low speed - lowest broadband speed of English regions
 - Given policy prioritisation and investment, it can be done, eg in “rural France”

Table 2

- Clustering: of public sector services can stimulate the demand and create efficiencies of scale
 - eg market town pilot – hot desks, office suite, etc
 - “Knock-on” effect – availability to other service providers/users
- Business-led solutions
 - opportunities eg post offices in farm shops
 - planning – potentially restrictive
 - pub is the hub eg White Horse, Blythborough
 - Terrington St Clement – post office plus police
- Broadband, BT and “Digital Partnership”
 - Gap: low rural demand & poor availability leads to “catch 22” where rural option is not available
 - Leicestershire village: private contractor for community, get domestic/business buy-in and customer volumes
 - Technical: variety of supply technologies, eg cable, satellite, ground, across power lines

Table 3

- Health
 - Norfolk, Swaffham & Thetford led activity bringing range of services to one site, eg GPs, day surgery, mental health, dietary, X-rays.
 - Issues: National policies don’t allow some services to be offered.
- Transport: Easton College students and commuters shared fast and timely service
- Co-operatives/Consortia
 - buying goods/services, eg Anglia Farmers £35m to £165m turnover in 4 years
 - commercial clusters, eg North Norfolk Coast and Deepdale
 - Support through planning/highways enable business to “make the case”.

Table 4

- Clustering to aggregate need and provide cost effective service, eg Suffolk CC Community Boards for villages and market town
- Essex CC have NI target on access to services
 - Analysis gaps in provision
 - Link to local transport plan
 - Support local access forums
 - With PCT and DCs, pilot on out-reach “village agents” to help older people
- N Norfolk Active Travel initiative

- Off road safe walking and cycle routes
 - Green gym trails
- New challenges
 - Aging, less mobile population
 - Need to adapt to climate change, eg heat waves and flash floods
- Innovative ideas
 - Schools are an under-utilised asset but barrier of H&S, security, cost
 - Sell village hall and enable community use of school all year round
 - Monks Eleigh community shop
- Maximise use (and hence viability) of public transport
 - Joined up planning for homes, work and leisure
 - Improved travel information
 - combines public and community transport info
 - consistency of language
 - Huntingdon quarterly travel booklet
 - But time tables uncontrolled and change frequently

ANNEX B: Access –What Can/Should EE Forum Do?

Actions

- Produce statement of rights to reasonable access
- Solutions are both to provide access to service at source or remote
- Improved urban/rural data was required and true value and attributes of *rural*
- Improved bottom-up community engagement would be beneficial, say via Community Led Planning
- Better evaluation of impact beyond simple financial cost, eg health, environment, quality of life.
 - What was the impact of not intervening?
 - Full economic value analysis
- Need to relate access problems to external priorities and planned objectives of RES and RSS
- Lobby for explicit national / regional resources for rural solutions

Process

- Need a clear view of the issues.
 - Build on process of papers and evidence put together through the Forum, eg on rural deprivation
 - Use info available on county basis – transform into short briefs: national & regional lobbying
- Can we put papers together into a rural vision? – mini “Rural White Paper”
 - what “rural” can do – the contribution
 - how can we do it in context of integrated regional approach
 - be proactive – pull out issues and prioritise.
- Needs to be for 15 – 20 year period
 - develop a “vision”
 - for government
 - for private sector and businesses
 - gives them a degree of certainty on course of action

How to Resource? What is needed?

- Available information – capturing locally, presenting regionally
- EERF leadership role – how?
- Define role of stakeholders – members of the Forum
- Identify key players outside EERF, including private sector
- Engage with the “mainstream” including
 - Regional Cities East
 - growth agenda
- Linking to London
 - Greater South East
 - Midlands
- Short and timely process and outputs
 - 6 months period of activity
 - will need a good design process
 - paper – consultation, response and final document
- Funding routes?