

Wednesday 3 March 2010

Shuttleworth College,
Old Warden Park, Biggleswade,
Bedfordshire SG18 9EA

East of England Rural Forum

“Rural Development”

Minutes

Attendees

Anne Marie Hamilton	Brian Hayes	Cindy Winn
Cllr Hazel Williams	Cllr John Goodwin	Cllr Judith Watson
Cllr Pat Olney	Cllr Teresa Heritage	Cllr John Buchanan
David Wood	Donald Northwood	Edwin Jones
Jasmine Joolia	Edward Iveagh	Jim Gledhill
Jilly Hall	John Atherton	John Yates
Kate Sayer	Kirsten Bennett	Laurent Martial
Mags Lambert	Martin Collison	Mick Carr
Mike Carter	Nicholas Charrington	Nicola Currie
Nicola Lloyd	Pat Holtom	Phil Bennett-Lloyd
Philip Hayes	Rachel Carrington	Sarah Hughes
Suzanne Harris		

Apologies

Adrian Izzard	Anna Aiken	Cheryl Rose
Cllr Stuart Pile	Deborah Ollett	Frances Bedding
Graham Hedger	Greg Luton	John Barker
John Carrick	John Day	Karen Staples
Kate Belinis	Katherine Blake	Marie Francis
Peter Medhurst	Philip Wilson	Richard Woolley
Tina Ellis		

Speakers

John Buchanan – Anglia
Ruskin University
Mick Carr, GO East
Tony Talbot – Chief Exec,
Marston Vale Trust

Planning system and its ability to act as an enabling feature or
constraint on rural development
Best use of land – Valuing Eco systems
Social Enterprise – a model for sustainable green infrastructure
delivery

1. Welcome

John Yates thanked Pat Holtom and Suzanne Harris, EERF Vice-Chairs for covering admirably for him throughout his recent absence due to ill health.

He informed the Forum that Gareth Jones who was due to speak today had unfortunately had to give his apologies so there was an empty slot on the agenda.

2. Matters arising from meeting 9 December

The minutes accepted and approved as a true and accurate record of the last Forum meeting.

3. **News and Reports**

Pat Holtom asked that if any of the members had any queries or comments about the format or content of the Forum meetings, to please ensure that these were passed to a member of the Steering Group so that their views could be aired and the Steering Group could have an understanding of the Forum's opinions.

Pat gave a brief resume of the plans and dates for future meetings. The next meeting would be our **annual conference planned for 12 May** when the Rural White Paper would be launched, hopefully with EEDA presence at the launch. The document was going to take the format of an action plan and give the key rural issues for the Eastern region and be forwarded to the Rural Minister.

The venue for this May meeting will be in a central location and will be confirmed in due course.

The **Forum quarterly meeting on 9 June** is going to be on the topic of Rural Business and the Environment. The meeting on **8 September** will be on the subject of Regional Governance and will discuss Town and Parish Councils, Regional Strategy Boards, Counties and unitary authorities. The final meeting of the year on **8 December** would focus on Food and Agriculture and will look at progress with the regional food strategy. All meetings will seek to identify positive aspects as well as problems; these would be input to meetings with the rural minister. Pat asked members if they had ideas for topics at future meetings to please advise her.

National Rural Forums' meeting with Dan Norris, the Rural Affairs Minister - Pat informed the meeting that she had hoped to be able to enlighten members as to what happened. However the planned meeting had been postponed until the following week – 9 March. Affordable Rural Housing is the current hot topic and we are keen to have positive examples where issues in this area are being addressed and met.

RAF Review by Defra – Pat said that not many people had completed the questionnaire which had been sent to all members. Following a request she asked that the secretariat redistribute it and urged members to fill it in as soon as possible and return by the early part of next week. *(After the meeting, secretariat confirmed that Defra would still accept responses despite the 12 February required by date.)*

NALC Awards – Pat asked if anyone knew a Town Clerk or other official that could be recommended for a NALC Awards (closing date 31 March).

East of England Regional Assembly - On 1 April, this no longer exist and a new regional responsible authority will be in place comprised mostly of local authority leaders and EEDA representatives. The terms of reference are complex and the Forum will be seeking representation.

Richard Bindless pointed out to the Forum that the Regional Strategy Board is what will replace EERA and there will be Development and Implementation Boards (DIBs) that support the Strategy Board. He understands that there will be DIBs for each of Housing and Regeneration; Business, Innovation and Skills; Environment; Transport and Infrastructure; and Social and Community. The Forum needs to keep this mind at the start of April and try to ensure the appropriate representation.

There was no report from the Housing Sub Group as Graham Hedger was ill.

Learning and Skills – Martin Collison told the Forum that there is an event planned for 13 April which would discuss the region's skills strategy which EEDA are responsible for drafting. A strong voice is needed and the output of the Rural White Paper will be put to use.

Pat commented that the input of EERF members in the afternoon's Rural White Paper Consultation event would be valued and there other interested rural organisations attending.

4. Rural Development

The first of our speakers, John Buchanan, Senior Lecturer in Spatial Planning at Anglia Ruskin University made a detailed presentation on the subject of the planning system and its ability to act as an enabling feature or constraint on rural development.

He was followed by Mick Carr, GO East who talked on the best use of land and the use of a technique called Valuing Eco-Systems.

Tony Talbot, Chief Executive of Marston Vale Trust then presented on Social Enterprise and what they had been able to achieve at Marston Vale to develop a sustainable woodland area on a site that was previously used for heavy industry.

The three presenters then answered questions from the members.

- How do you balance public access with biodiversity and maintaining the wildlife habitat?
TT: Access is very important and necessarily in conflict. At Marston Vale we created a wetland trail which people could use without affecting the rest of the area. Design is key.
- What types of trees are grown at Marston Vale?
TT: Native hardwoods are grown from seed. We have a wide variety of species.
- What advice could you give to a small village with a small acreage of woodland/allotments regarding wood fuel?
TT: Biomass fuelled boilers could use wood from your allotments. You could contact Wood Fuels East for advice in the first instance. It is very important to consider waste wood as fuels. They can be turned into woodchips/pellets and used in schools, village halls, etc.
- With regard to sustainable development of Greenfield sites, how do you see development of the greenbelt areas?
JB: Greenbelt sites were put in place originally to stop urban sprawl. The land is not necessarily of good environmental quality. Key issues are housing, employment and sustainable growth. It is crucial to involve the local community where parish planning was particularly valuable. Although exception sites are often thought as not a good idea, they can have a very important role in the community, particularly if there is a mix of housing types and not just affordable housing.
- What currency was used to value the eco-systems?
MC: Difficult. For instance health benefits well known but how do you put a value on extra years of someone's life but calculated it as best as possible and put into £s. Project had looked at different ways to weigh up the benefits and compare. An eco-system toolkit is required to provide evidence especially to get public spending. Care must be taken to ensure that eco-systems are not applied only in controversial cases and to ensure that community involvement is taken from local to higher levels.
- Is the cause of the planning problem that the process and system is set hard and fast?
MC: The timing of engagement, when planners go through the process and so on has to be at exactly the right time. Some planners accept applications to keep to percentages required eg an Essex Planning Department put an advert in the press in the past stating that they would not be responsible when problems occur with the housing.
- Today's report by the Rural Advocate considered the implications of young people moving out of rural areas but you need to have good jobs to keep the young people there. New housing is not necessarily a bad thing because Marston Vale, for example was a result of new housing.

- Skilling people – wouldn't a conference be a good thing to inform people?
JJ/SH: NRCC, RCCE and SACRE all had just such events to help people understand the constraints within their area.
- Is clustering better than just parish planning?
In Bedfordshire the attitude appears to be if growth is happening, let's control it. Suffolk is encouraging clustering on planning. In Essex only one district has a formal cluster district.
HW: clustering makes it easier for councils but makes parishes worry about being taken over.

Pat said that she would raise the planning issues with the Steering Group. The Rural White Paper would be a good tool to use but the Forums and RCCs should also have a role.

Pat thanked all the speakers for their very informative and useful presentations.

AGM 2010

Review of the Year

John Yates informed the Forum that he has been honoured to have been chair for the last few years but would not be standing for chair. On being appointed, he had hoped it would develop to become more of an influencing active forum and hopes that he has been successful in achieving this goal. He believes we should continue to develop in this way in the future. We try to influence the ministers on what is happening in rural communities. For example how did we reach disadvantaged people – we made a paper which was presented to the minister in September and been quite active. We will write up an annual report and circulate it. John thanked the members for their support over the past year.

Elections

There had been only one nomination for Chair which was Pat Holtom who was proposed by John Yates and seconded by Fran Bedding. Pat was elected by the members nem con. Pat accepted the position formally and said it would be an honour to be the chair for a forum that made strong representation at all levels and represents so many organisations. The future of rural forums was uncertain due to the forthcoming general election but she hopes we can maintain and build on the work to date and progress rural affairs in cooperation with other rural organisations. Pat thanked John Yates for his work as Chair over the past few years

Suzanne Harris was proposed for Vice Chair by Martin Collison and seconded by Richard Woolley. Martin Collison was proposed for Vice Chair by Anne Marie Hamilton and seconded by Nicholas Charrington. Both were elected nem con.

Suzanne has served as Vice Chair for the past year and looks forward to working with Pat and Martin.

Martin had said that this was an unexpected honour and wanted to make us aware that we would all have our work cut out to get our voice heard. He felt we would need to push on the development of skills too.

Close of Meeting