

EERF Steering Group

10 am 20 January 2010
GO East, Eastbrook, Cambridge

Minutes

Attendees

Pat Holtom (Vice Chairman & Norfolk Essex)	Suzanne Harris (Vice Chairman & Essex)
Martin Collison (L&S Subgroup)	Mick Carr (GOE)
Sarah Hughes (Bedfordshire)	Kirsten Bennett (Cambridgeshire)
David Wood (Secretariat)	

Apologies

John Yates (Chairman)	Francis Bedding (Suffolk)
Graham Hedger (Housing Subgroup)	Kate Belinis (Herts)

In John Yates' absence, Pat Holtom chaired the meeting.

1. Minutes of Meeting on 9 December 2009

Subject to correction of the names Nick Page and Jilly Hall, the minutes were **agreed**.

2. Actions and Matters Arising

Mick Carr was continuing to pursue a speaker from Natural England regarding valuing Eco systems presentation.

David had confirmation from Cindy Winn that there were no regular meetings that John as Chairman of the Forum attended.

Mick confirmed that there were no regular meetings with Government Office or its departments that the Chair of the RAF should attend.

Action: *Pat* to draft a letter of thanks to John Yates on behalf of the Forum.

3. EERF Development

Pat and David reported on the December meeting of the RAF Chairs with the Rural Affairs Minister, Dan Norris. With the impending general election, it was important that the Forums, both nationally, regionally and county increased the knowledge and awareness of their work and linked their activities to the mainstream agenda regarding rural, Local Area Agreements and LSPs. The current review of RAFs by Defra was critical for future support of the existence of RAFs and we should ensure maximum response from our members.

Action: *David* to encourage responses by members to the RAF Review by Defra.

Action: *David* to draft a briefing for all East of England MPs on the work and role of the RAF.

Martin reported on the activities within the Learning and Skills Sub-group. He was pleased to note a good mix, good attendance and more people wishing to join his sub-group. An

important topic was the new credit framework for bite-size learning and money following the learner. Presentations on these topics were planned for the next meeting.

Regarding housing, there was concern that the number of building starts was reducing and that the expectation for this coming year was for further cuts.

The imminent abolition of the Regional Assembly and its replacement by the responsible regional authority, composed of elected members and EEDA reinforced the need for the forum to promote and market its value and activities.

Action: *David* to copy the RAF briefing paper to the leaders of the new Development and Implementation Boards.

4. Rural White Paper

Martin of Collison Associates introduced the members of the team that would be producing the paper on behalf of the Forum. Emma Powlett would be leading on the topics of land, environment and climate change; Lynn Collison would be leading on social aspects; Martin would focus on business, food and farming; while Margaret Cook would lead on health and housing.

The meeting discussed the structure and content of the proposed paper. The following key points were noted:

- Climate change and renewable energy was so important that it should have its own focus;
- Heritage and the build environment should be the key part of the report;
- There was a need to gain the views of younger people including support for apprenticeships within the balanced growth section;
- There was a need for explicit planning policy that protected existing employment land and made other land available for housing especially social affordable homes. (It was noted that in most social housing, residents were not allowed to work from home, yet in rural areas compared to urban areas there was three times the extent of home working.)

Martin outlined his plan for the consultation session for the afternoon of 3 March. The emphasis was on ensuring active discussion and sense of involvement by all members with no pre-conceived expectations of the content of the paper.

Regarding the launch of the final paper, it was going to consist of good case study examples of how rural communities and businesses were benefitting the region and the country, but required support and encouragement to continue to do so and hopefully thrive.

The case studies should cover a range of topics and locations and embrace both private and public activities.

5. Plan for AGM 3 March

The Steering Group noted the arrangements and the need for nominations for chairs and vice chairs for the coming year.

6. EERF Planning Programme of Events

The Steering Group noted the plans for the next three sessions and agreed to consider the details further at its next meeting.

7. RAE Secretariat

The Steering Group noted the financial report from Rural Action East. It endorsed the approval of the invoices from Rural Action East as signed off by Mick Carr on behalf of Government Office.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The Steering Group noted that the Rural White Paper Working Group would be meeting on 25 March to discuss the first draft of the paper. The launch date would need to be postponed into early May. Pat and David were trying to arrange a meeting with Deborah Cadman, CEO, EEDA to gain high profile support for the paper. Given the AGM and election of new chair and vice chairs, the Steering Group agreed to set a new date by email after the meeting on 3 March.

Close of Meeting

David Wood
Secretary to EERF
Rural Action East