

EERF Steering Group: Minutes

25 March 2010 at 2pm

GO East, Eastbrook, Cambridge

Present

Pat Holtom (Chairman & Norfolk)
Suzanne Harris (Vice Chairman & Essex)
Martin Collison (Vice Chairman & L&S Sub-Group)
Mick Carr (GO East)
Francis Bedding (Suffolk)
David Wood (Secretariat)
Cindy Winn (EEDA)
Lynn Collison & Emma Powlett (Collison Associates)

Apologies

Kirsten Bennett (Cambridgeshire)
Kate Belinis (Hertfordshire)
Graham Hedger (Housing Sub-Group)
Sarah Hughes (Bedfordshire)
Nicola Lloyd (CRC)

1. Rural White Paper

On behalf of Collison and Associates Ltd, Martin briefed the Steering Group on the feedback received from various parties to the draft Rural White Paper. He was pleased to report comments from the police, CRC, Wildlife Trust and the NFU but nothing from any individual member of the Forum.

There was a brief discussion on the importance of high quality broadband in rural areas. The comments and feedback reinforced its importance and the benefit of it having significant exposure within the White Paper.

Prompted by a question from Cindy, the group discussed what made the paper a '*regional document*'. The answer is that the paper would be used to influence regional strategies, priorities and programmes to take full account of the needs of rural communities and businesses and that this influence would extend to local delivery and intervention programmes that would actually benefit rural areas.

There was a strong desire from the group that the Rural White Paper would be a living document that would continue to be referred to during future policy development and programme delivery. As such the chapter on delivery and associated action plan was a critical component to the full plan. The group decided that the final White Paper should comprise two separate, distinct parts. One would be all of the background information and descriptive content; the other component of the paper would be a stand alone action plan which could be updated and refreshed in response to progress and re-issued annually to record progress with the proposals within the paper.

The Introduction by Pat should focus on the topics of broadband, young peoples and families including skills, jobs and housing all in the context of balanced growth in rural areas with the aim of creating sustainable communities.

The meeting then went on to discuss the launch and publicity associated with the final version of the paper. The group decided to cancel the specific launch on 12 May and to use the meeting in

September for the launch of the Paper. This would improve its timing with respect to the new national government. The launch event would be opened by Deborah Cadman, CEO EEDA, and closed with another key speaker such as the Essex County Leader. In between there would be two or three case studies illustrating the contribution of rural to the region's economy.

Action Point: **Suzanne** to investigate suitable speaker from Essex.

Action Point: **Frances** to investigate availability and suitability of a BT speaker regarding broadband.

Action Point: **David** to investigate projects on 'G8way' and 'Bridging generation gap' projects lead by Cambridgeshire ACRE in its RDPE Programme.

Action Point: **All** to consider ideas and provide proposals for making the launch event a success.

The launch event would be a half-day morning session ending with lunch and opportunity to network and discuss the Paper and the contributions. A venue close to the centre of the region would be used such as the Trinity Centre.

It was agreed that both paper and electronic versions of the Rural Paper and its action plan would be produced. Paper versions would be particularly useful for MPs, members of the Forum and leaders of the sub-regional local authorities. The action plan should be a stand-alone insert into the main body of the report. Regarding references, it was agreed that the full URL reference should appear in electronic versions but the paper version should have the source information only.

Action Point: **Martin** to send final paper and electronic version of the White Paper to the Steering Group when available.

Cindy, Frances, Lynn and Emma left the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting 20 January 2010

The minutes were **agreed** without change.

3. Future Forum Members Meetings

9 June Environment and Estate based businesses, environment and tourism

David reported that it was unlikely that Elvedon Estates would be available to host the meeting. It was proposed that the National Trust Wimpole Hall be contacted as a possible venue. Despite the competition from the East Anglia Cereal conference on 9 June, the Forum meeting would go ahead on the same date. Ideas for speakers included Alison Smyth, National Trust Regional Manager, based at Blickling; Jason Beedell, consultant who wrote the rural estates report for EMDA and a short presentation from a member of the Wimpole Hall staff with a tour of relevant areas. A speaker from CLA would be a useful reserve.

The meeting on 8 September would be the launch of the Rural White Paper as discussed above.

The meeting on 8 December was re-confirmed with a topic of food and agriculture.

4. Feedback and News from Minister's Meeting

Pat and Suzanne reported on the meeting earlier in March with Dan Norris where the subject of affordable housing was discussed. There was no news on the review of RAFs that Defra had started. The network of Chairs was considering the value of an away day on 20th May when fallout from the general election meant that a standard meeting with the minister was highly unlikely.

The group believed that there was benefit from briefing all East of England MPs about the work of the Forum. Martin also suggested that the Forum engage with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Environment, Food and rural Affairs (EFRA). All MPs should be invited to the launch of the White Paper and receive a copy of it. Regarding the draft briefing for MPs this was approved subject to a comment about the volunteer nature of the Forum and its low cost but high benefit.

5. Rural Forum Development

The Steering Group supported the idea of continuing to produce position papers and to adopting motions as suggested by members as a result of discussion held at the quarterly members' meetings. The Chairman of the meeting should summarise at the end what the information received, identify the key issues and suggest ideas and actions that could be pursued by the Forum and its Steering Group. These actions could either be taken forward as a specific paper or meeting with key regional stakeholders or could be the basis for arranging a meeting on a specific subject.

The Steering Group discussed the activities of the sub-groups. The Group reiterated the relevance and importance of the existing two sub-groups on housing and learning and skills. The group also discussed the value of creating a third group on access and services which would also include transport. The group felt that this would have value and benefit to the activities of the Forum.

Action Point: **Pat** to meet with and discuss the housing sub-group with Graham Hedger. (*David meeting Graham on morning 25 May in Ipswich*)

Action Point: **Martin** to send terms of reference for his sub-group to David as the basis for the creation of an access sub-group. (*Done*)

Action Point: **David** to invite representatives from the existing Access and Transport group to meet with the steering group to discuss how they would set up a sub-group.

The next meeting of the steering group would be in the afternoon of 9 June after the morning members' meeting.

6. Administration/Finance

David explained his latest understanding of funding of RAFs in light of both expected financial cuts and the formation of a new government. After discussion with Alan Bell (GO East), David would submit to Defra an outline budget for three months and for six months. The three month budget would be front loaded with expenditure to support the production, launch and preparation of the Rural White Paper.

The Steering Group agreed to use some of its budget to support local county forums to hold White Paper launch events around the region.

The Steering Group approved the final outturn, financial statement and the projected expenditure and budget for next year.

Close of Meeting