

## **EERF Steering Group: Minutes**

**21<sup>st</sup> July 2011 at 10.30am**  
**Brightspace, Ipswich, IP2 0HH**

### **Present**

Pat Holtom (Chairman & Norfolk)  
Suzanne Harris (Vice Chairman & Essex)  
Frances Bedding (Suffolk)  
David Wood (Secretariat)  
Mags Lambert (Secretariat)

### **Apologies**

Martin Collison (Vice Chairman & L&S Subgroup)  
Anne Marie Hamilton (Bedfordshire)  
Kirsten Bennett (Cambridgeshire)  
Kate Belinis (Hertfordshire)  
John Simmons (EEDA)

### **1. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2011 were **agreed**.

### **2. Defra Rural and Farming Network**

The Steering Group reviewed the latest draft written by Martin, but with David's amendments, with the intention of ensuring its clarity; that it was fit for purpose; and that it met Defra's requirements in representing rural and farming in a clear, equitable and practical manner. An agreed, important principle was that EE Rural Forum name, brand and profile was retained in the proposal and that its value provided to the new network through its extensive and wide network was demonstrated and preserved.

There was concern that there was a risk that 'rural business' would be interpreted in a restricted way to only mean farming, food and agriculture. All recent analyses of rural economic activity showed a broad range of business sectors, very similar to urban locations with agri-farming contributing a small GDP compared to (for example) retail and manufacturing. In the same vein, LEP representation should not be dominated by one particular sector.

The SG was concerned at the confusing terminology especially of 'Network' and 'Board'. These should be clarified in the final draft.

Finally, the proposed RFN should have a strong and influential presence. This would be enabled through a high profile independent chairman. Potential individuals included George Courtauld, Karen Livingstone and Caroline Cranbrook. These should be considered in discussions with FAB once the decision and feedback had been received from Defra.

*Action Points:* **David** to make changes to RFN proposal and discuss with Martin in time for submission by 29<sup>th</sup> July.

*Action Points:* **Martin** to note concerns regarding both LEP representation and sectors in rural businesses.

### Previous Actions

**Pat and Suzanne with Martin** to meet Nicola Currie and Pam Forbes to discuss how best to progress formation of an 'EE' Rural and Farming Group. - *Done*

**Pat and Suzanne** to sound out Defra on their requirements and aims of RFN. - *Done*

**John** to discuss RFN with Cindy and get her take on it. – Closed

### 3. Events and Meetings

Suzanne updated the meeting with plans of Essex Rural Partnership and proposal for joint meeting with EERF. Its November meeting would be on food security and sustainability with particular Essex and SE LEP concerns and as such was not appropriate for a joint meeting with EERF. Instead, she suggested **18<sup>th</sup> January with theme of Localism** and all its constituent policy aspects such as communities, planning and Big Society. By January, the Localism Act would have started to be implemented and improved understanding should have occurred. A meeting in January would also help with planning of activities by members ready for the next financial year. This was **agreed** by the SG.

*Action Points:* **Suzanne** to confirm arrangement with ERP and arrange suitable venue in north Essex.

*Action Points:* **Mags** to alert EERF members of topic and date and liaise with Suzanne on detailed planning of event.

Regarding the proposed EERF meeting in November, Mags reported that NFU venue was not available on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, the provisional date. The alternative of **23<sup>rd</sup> November** was **agreed**, which would also avoid clash with ERP.

Regarding theme for meeting, David reported on recent conversations with Suffolk Climate Change Partnership who had responded positively to receipt of '*Vibrant Rural Communities*' and *Sustainability East* and the newly formed CIC, which combined the former regional climate change partnership and Sustainable Round Table. Environment was a major topic of our White Paper and it was an important and differentiating topic for the east of England. The FAB strategy, '*2020 Vision*' also had environmental sustainability as a key topic and this may form a good event in the spirit of the new Farming, Food and Rural Network East. It was **agreed** that **Climate and Sustainable Environment on 23<sup>rd</sup> November** would be next EERF meeting and that through Martin, contributions from our new FAB colleagues would be solicited.

*Action Points:* **Mags** to book NFU venue and alert members to November meeting.

*Action Points:* **Mags** to plan detailed agenda and recruit speakers with assistance from Martin.

### 4. EERF Planning and Development

#### Membership

Mags reported on progress with updating membership as requested by last SG meeting and distributed new list.

#### Previous Actions

**Fran/Pat** to contact Lydia Smith, EE Tourism Board, regarding membership - *Done*

**Suzanne** to contact Chrissie Pepper of Sustainability East – *Done*, see proposed meeting topic

**Mags** to invite Philip Eden of Action for Market Towns (AMT) – *Done* and will join EERF

**Mags** to distribute revised list of members to SG before its next meeting. - *Done*

#### Housing Subgroup

Jasmine continued to discuss subgroup with Flagship, Hastoe and HCA regarding its re-launch. Complicated by all government policy changes, changes to HCA offices and latest (reduced) HCA budgets.

### **Previous Action**

**Jasmine** to negotiate with Flagship on its support for housing subgroup. - On-going

### L&S Subgroup

David in discussion with John regarding transfer of information and future secretary support to subgroup.

### **Previous Action**

**John** to handover L&S secretariat information and background to RAE (DRW) - *Done*

### Broadband Subgroup

Little progress of formation of subgroup so far. James King and Edwin J Jones would be useful members.

### **Previous Action**

**Fran and David** to pursue establishment of BB Subgroup. - On-going

Fran updated SG with latest developments and progress of bids by Suffolk and Norfolk to BDUK and of bids to EEDA for Songbird projects.

## **5. EERF Secretariat**

### Finance

David distributed statement on the budget for the Forum for 2011/12. He confirmed that with the Suffolk CC funding and residual funds from last year the EERF was a going concern and could support two members' meetings. This was helped considerably by the free use of the NFU venue, with only refreshments to be paid for. He informed the SG that a bill had now been received from British Racing School for event held at its premises last November.

However, there was much less money to pay for RAE work and its support would have to reduce accordingly, with more self service support activity by members and the steering group.

### Members Travel Expenses

With the reduced money, David asked SG to consider two matters.

In the last budget, the chancellor had increased the mileage rate before income liability to 45ppm from 40ppm. In recognition of the increased cost of travel, RAE had increased its rate accordingly and asked for a decision by the SG. It was **agreed** that the mileage rate paid for expenses incurred on EERF business be increased to 45ppm.

Secondly, it has been practice to pay members, mostly town and parish councillors, their travel costs. Given the much reduced budget, David asked whether this should continue. The SG **agreed** that from now on, all attendees should seek reimbursement of travel expenses from their host organization not the Forum but that special pleading from individuals would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**Mags** to inform members of changes to Forum travel expenses policy.

### RAE

Finally, David informed the SG that he would be leaving RAE on 31<sup>st</sup> August. However, his personal departure did not affect RAE's commitment to and support for the EERF and from that date, Mags Lambert would take on the lead role of secretariat support to the EERF.

On behalf of the EERF, Pat expressed her great appreciation of his work and the contribution that David made to the Forum. She had enjoyed working with him over that past few years and wished him well for the future.

**6. Dates of next Steering Group meeting**

After members' meeting on **23<sup>rd</sup> November, 1.30pm at NFU.**

Meeting Closed