

EPHING FOREST LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Sustainable Communities Theme Group Meeting

Date: 22nd January 2010

Time: 14:30 – 16:30

MINUTES

Present

Cllr Anne Grigg (AG) Chair	Epping Forest District Council Vice-Chair
Cllr Mary Sartin (MS) Vice Chair	Environment Portfolio holder, EFDC
Keith Brown	Essex Regional Organiser, Federation of Small Businesses
Alan Hall (AH)	Director of Housing EFDC
John Houston (JH)	EF LSP Manager
Keith Hughes (KH)	Business Link In The East Of England
Claire Martin (CM)	Policy officer, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
Chris Overend (CO)	Policy and Research Officer, EFDC
John de Wilton Preston (JP)	Director of Planning & Economic Development, EFDC
Kassandra Polyzoides (KP)	Asst Director of Planning, EFDC
Nick Roberts (NR)	Passenger Transport Co-ordination Centre Manager, ECC
Barbara Stock (BS)	EF Lifelong Learning Partnership Coordinator, EFC
Gill Wallis (GW)	Council Community Development, EFDC
Vicki Willis (VW)	Economic Development Officer, EFDC
Amanda Wintle (AW)	Planning Officer, Epping Forest District Council

Apologies

Jacqui Foile (JF)	Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Epping Forest
Louisa Sadlers (LS)	Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce

Minutes

David Wright (DW)	LSP Admin Support
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1. Welcome and apologies

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies from JF and LS. It was also noted that AH had sent his apologies and would be late. GW, who would link the theme group to community development work, was welcomed to her first meeting.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting (20/11) were agreed without amendment.

3. Referring to the actions list

JH stated that the outstanding actions from the last meeting would be covered by the agenda items to follow.

4. Feedback from last Board meeting.

AG said the presentation to the Board on profiling the district had been excellent and thanked Sarah King and her colleagues. JH added that the profiles were already

being used, for example as evidence for a funding bid. He said that it was intended that the profiles would form part of a 'Know your Place' mini data observatory, a one-stop shop for data on the district. Other data sources to be held on-line in 'Know Your Place' would be output from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Shaping the Future, Place Survey and Your Voice Matters results. This was expected to be up and running in a week or two.

On the Future Jobs Fund, JH reported that 160 posts had been confirmed for West Essex. He added that we were now a 'preferred bidder' and, as such, there had been an approach from the Department of Works and Pensions to double the number of placements. Informal discussions had taken place on this and Harlow may be approaching other agencies to join in.

The work and remit of the West Essex Partnership was being developed. A Total Place seminar will take place in March to look at opportunities to improve efficiency.

Councillor Anthony Jackson is to be invited to join the board to represent the Essex Police Authority.

5. Stakeholder Conference

AG introduced the subject by informing the meeting that the Conference had a real 'buzz' as well as being professional and focused. KB felt that it was an example of good practice and asked that event planning arrangements **be shared with other partnerships that were planning similar events** JH reported that the Vox Pop video shown at the conference was now available on the EFDC web site. The 35 returned conference questionnaires were being analysed, **the results of which would be shared once completed.**

Actions 01 DW 02 JH

KP gave a brief account of the 'Meeting the environmental challenge, building a greener district' workshop. The question on how to encourage a reduction in carbon emissions was examined thoroughly. While we are doing well in raising awareness, it was felt we still needed to celebrate success and be better at monitoring the effectiveness of campaigns. There was also concern about conflicting messages in the media particularly around what happens to recycled material, more needs to be done to inform people about this. The council has a good record on recycling but we need to publicise the successes. Some workshop members were concerned about access to recycling facilities e.g. flats in Waltham Abbey. With regard to renewable energy it was thought that this should be a national approach and that local effort would be better spent concentrating on insulating properties. On transport, improving bus shelters and bus timetables, smaller buses on some routes, upgrading the bus fleets to more efficient models and flexible working hours would all help. NR added that ECC were keen that a review of passenger transport be undertaken as there was an impression that certain parishes were not getting the minimum level of service. The County would prefer it not to be ECC led and he suggested that it might suit a small T&F team that included operator representatives. AG suggested that the parishes ought to be represented and JH proposed Colin Thompson or Brian Surtees. It was agreed that **a fuller proposal be brought to the next meeting.** JH said that for the SCS we needed a small number of focused strategic objectives perhaps around environmental tourism or forestry farming which could be worked up in the draft Sustainable Community Strategy.

Action 03 NR

VW updated the meeting on the 'Developing prosperous local economies' workshop. The question addressed by the workshop was how to improve the number and quality of jobs in local areas to attract new business opportunities. Issues discussed included vacant properties and what can be done to reduce the number; tourism opportunities,

use of commercial agents and barriers such as visitor accommodation; importance of town centres and loyalty shopping schemes. KH said that the three key areas for hitting job targets are business start-ups, business growth and inward investment. KB said that there was a feeling that there was better coordination of business support services and GW added that the link to Epping Forest College was crucial to developing skills. JH said that for the SCS we needed to complement these issues with much further forward looking vision – what do we want and what are the barriers? KB thought the vision should be a pleasant place to live and work and that work from home needed fast broadband to be a viable option. JH asked whether we need to build coalitions to benefit from large capital investments? JP said that a West Essex Economic Partnership (involving Harlow, Uttlesford and Braintree) did exist in the past and that the Harlow CE had made reference its resurrection at the Essex Business Consortium but that it should engage with business more and not simply concentrate on economic development. JH felt that this might provide a focus for the LSPs work to sponsor and actively support this development.

AH briefed members on the 'Meeting the Housing Challenge' workshop. On the use of green belt land the majority agreed that it should be used for suitable developments and also affordable housing (80%). Increasing density of developments in town could be done by better use of brown field sites and high density building should be allowed provided it reflected the character of the area. On the question of the split of affordable housing between rented and shared equity a 70-30 ratio was accepted as Ok but this could be varied depending on circumstances. There was no consensus on the distribution of new housing developments – 5 members thought it should be spread through the district and 3 that it should be in 3 to 4 locations. KB asked if there was a balance between jobs and housing in the regional plan. JP replied that it was not possible to say because the plan was unclear on housing for the district. JH said that the LDF and the SCS would have to address the wicked issue of green belt versus housing. KH raised the scenario of an end to the commuter led high wage jobs in London and also the impact of the Olympic Village accommodation becoming available in 2013. AH said he thought that there would be a compromise solution using green belt and brown field and that the East of England Plan, once agreed, would tell us what we 'have to' provide.

JH asked for volunteers to formulate objectives for the revised SCS which he hoped to reduce from the 52 in the last SCS down to 10 overall – 3 or 4 for this theme group. **JH will pull together an initial view following the LSP Board awayday which the volunteer group (AH housing, KB business, VW environment, NR transport, KP economy and CO) will review.**
Action 04 JH

6. Oral update on PRG funded projects aligned to SC TG

It was agreed that a written report would be circulated with the minutes.

7. Further work programme

CO tabled a paper of recommendations from the Credit Crunch T&F for members to review. The recommendations and actions from the paper have been reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes together with any discussion notes and actions arising. These recommendations have already been agreed by the Board and JH agreed to **look through and choose the actions that we could start work on.** **Action 09 JH**

8. Local Development Framework update

AW reported that production of the LDF was on track at the moment. However, the uncertainties around the coordinated working that will be required to deliver the

regeneration and growth of Harlow remain and therefore the timetable for production cannot be completed.

9. EERA Consultations update

JP reported that there had not been time to prepare the LSP contribution for the previous phase of the consultation but that a workshop was being arranged to prepare a submission for the next round of consultation. The EERA consultation has been put back to March. It is expected to last for 12 weeks so there is a possibility it could run into the General Election. There have been successful legal challenges (e.g. from Welwyn Hatfield) to the 2021 review so EERA have been looking at developments in other areas and have sought quick feedback on these. Some information with caveats and issues has already been fed back. The workshop will be established once this emerging timetable has been finalised.

JH gave some feedback on the Local Transport Plan seminar which took place in Harlow on 7/12. He said that he thought it lacked interaction between the groups which didn't encourage debate. No feedback had been received from the exercise. NR said there may be further sessions. NR to update as required

11 Open Forum / AOB

BS reported on a Learning Partnership meeting and tabled a paper highlighting activities that support sustainable communities.

BS said that Epping Forest College is looking for a business representative for the Board and agreed to **email the requirements to KB**. VW said that the Employment Land Review Group were also looking for a business rep. **Action 10 BS**

VW reported that the Valuation Office would be appearing before the EFDC Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the end of January to talk specifically about the rise in business rates.

12 Date of Next meeting

The next meeting is on 19th March 2010 at 2:30 pm.

Appendix

Extract from 'Implementation of Recommendations Arising Out of Report of Task and Finish Team – Meeting the Challenge of the Credit Crunch' paper for agenda item 7 together with any discussions and actions (*in italics*) from the meeting.

Recommendation 1 That Partners work with LSPs across West Essex to support and identify opportunities for improved access to external funding and build on examples of good practice.

Action Inclusion of 'funding alert' item on agenda for Sustainable Communities Theme Group/and out of meetings network through which partners can report on new funding opportunities they have become aware of.

It was suggested that this could link in with the VAEF FAIR (Funding Advice and Information Resource) project.

Recommendation 2 That partners engage in and give full support to programmes designed to maximise access to Future Jobs Fund in the District.

Action 1 Submit further bids in subsequent rounds of the Fund

Action 2 Co-ordinate existing arrangements of various partners for job placements.

Action 3 Ensure arrangements in place to maximise the chance of the job placements following a successful career path

Discussions need to take place about capacity before progressing action 1 (see also minutes item 4 above). For action 2, discussions are ongoing with Department of Works and Pensions and Job Centre Plus. For Action 3, Employability are providing support but this needs to be kept under review

Recommendation 3 That partners consider the scope for future events and identify further opportunities for joining up existing support in the District.

Action 1 Hold a series of business engagement events covering individual subject areas of rateable values, emerging planning policy, M11 corridor and resultant opportunities.

Action 2 Hold Business Summit covering a range of issues including Essex Apprenticeships Scheme, practical advice on finance availability and recruiting for employment.

Action 3 Various partners to set out details of their current consultation arrangements with business community, including timescale for comments.

For Action 1 there is to be a West Essex showcase event in November. For action 3, a review of EFDC business consultation arrangements is being done. It was agreed that we need to look at how other agencies do this.

Recommendation 4 That the impact on advice-giving services such as CAB is kept under review by the Sustainable Communities Theme Group and partners commit to look at creative ways of meeting enhanced need if required in the third sector.

Action Hold regular meetings between Epping Forest CAB and District Council members to discuss key issues and, where necessary, agree remedial action required.

Funding of the CAB is under review but it was suggested that meetings need to be more frequent.

Recommendation 5 That the Sustainable Communities Theme Group, along with partners in the third sector, look for opportunities to support volunteering capability in the District.

Action 1 Each Partner on LSP to map out existing provision for volunteering opportunities within their own organisation and identify potential further opportunities.

Action 2 Draw up Volunteering Charter with each partner organisation to become a signatory

Action 3 District Council to include section within its staff induction arrangements on the benefits of volunteering

Members were asked to check whether their organisations have volunteering charters.

Action 05 All

Recommendation 6 That further work be undertaken by the Sustainable Communities Theme Group to determine a business plan for the growth of credit unions in the Epping Forest District.

Action Set up small Sub-Group to determine a specification setting out what the LSP expects in terms of the work of credit unions in alleviating the worst effects of the recession in the District, and the part the LSP can play in helping credit unions meet this aim

*A specification needs to be drawn up but it is a specialised area. It was agreed that a work group be formed that includes JP, JH and CO and that **Bob Palmer be approached as someone with a formal finance background.***

Action 06 JP/CO

Recommendation 7 That the role of the Business Champion be kept under review and opportunities for developing the role be investigated by the Sustainable Communities Theme Group.

Action 1 Draw up proposed protocol for role of Business Engagement Champion setting out clearly identified objectives.

Action 2 Produce information setting out details of performance relating to existing commitments to assist the business community e.g. invoices paid within 20 day timescale, distribution of publicity and encouraging take-up of Small Business Rate Relief.

*For action 1 it was noted that Cllr Whitbread had been selected but that the role needed to be expanded and needed a clear role definition and involvement. For action 2, KB said that care needed to be taken and gave an example where the overall authority target was being met while individual departments were missing their targets. KB also informed the meeting that the Police now had a 10 day invoice payment target and NR added that ECC were also aiming at 10 days. KB said that payment targets also need to be a condition of contracts that are then subcontracted out so that the subcontractors are also paid within the same target. **CO agreed to chase this.***

Action 07 CO

Recommendation 8 That plans are drawn up to agree a new economic development strategy in full consultation with key partners.

Action Determine scope, required resources and time table production of Economic Development Strategy.

*There is an issue with finding the resource to do this work. KB suggested using a new government funded graduate scheme. VW will **expand on what is involved in producing an EDS.***

Action 08 VW