

Wealden Local Strategic Partnership Meeting - 10 July 2007

held in the Community Centre, Polegate.

Present

Ian Chisnall (Churches Together In Sussex) - Chair
Lisa Compton (East Sussex Downs & Weald PCT)
Richard Watson (East Sussex Downs & Weald PCT)
Karen Crozier (Community Network)
Pam Doodes (Leader, Wealden DC)
Chantal Wilson (Member, Wealden DC)
David White (Member, Wealden DC)
Mark O'Brien (ESFRS)
Richard Allen (Sussex Police)
Martin Small (South Downs Joint Committee)
Teresa Gittins (AIRS)
Paul Smith (Environment Agency)

In attendance

David Paine (GOSE – LDF/Planner)
Charles Lant (Wealden DC – Chief Executive)
David Palmer (Wealden DC – Head, Policy & Review)
Jacqueline Watson (Wealden DC – Planning Policy Manager)
Caroline Adcock (Wealden DC – LSP – LDF Liaison)
Diana Carlick (Wealden DC – Community Sport Network)
Enda Dowd (Hastings LSP Co-ordinator, Observer)

Apologies

Kathy Fordham (NFU)
Jeff Hart (Freedom Leisure)
Alison Horan (ESCC)
Trevor Leggo (Sussex Association of Local Councils)
Philip Ayers (Rural Transport Partnership)
Peter Minshull (Highways Agency)
Neil Honnor (Sussex Police)

Ian welcomed Lisa Compton as the new representative for the PCT. She introduced Richard Watson who will attend meetings on her behalf when necessary.

Charlie advised that Greg Falvey would no longer be attending LSP meetings and asked that his contribution be noted with thanks. A new Housing representative is being sought for the next meeting.

Minutes – matters arising

David Whitehead should read David White. The notes of the previous meeting were otherwise agreed and matters arising already included within the agenda.

[Note: the previous minutes have been corrected and will shortly be replaced on the LSP website]

Update on challenges facing partners

Most partners re-confirmed the challenges discussed at the March meeting:

Mark: tackling anti-social behaviour is a priority.

Martin: funding problems are a key challenge for his organisation. The current focus is continuing casework and enhancement work.

Lisa: PCT is keen to continue to build partnerships. The other key focus at present is the Draft Regional Health Strategy.

David (Paine): GOSE is keen for authorities to concentrate on place shaping. Thus far, the core activities for GOSE remain unchanged.

Teresa: one of several challenges over the coming years is to get recognition for pockets of hardship and deprivation in rural areas.

Paul: the Environment Agency is keen to support LSPs and community links. Currently, growth and the links with LDFs are top line issues. Water quality and open spaces are key interests within that. The main challenges are around the current changes, LSP awareness and the merging of three administrative areas into two (East and West). The restructure will replicate water management body catchments rather than administrative boundaries between East and West Sussex, but EA will work to local authority boundaries in terms of planning.

Carnegie Project update

Teresa briefed partners on the progress of the Wealden Carnegie-funded project which is part of a national programme. The original bid was for a project to look at how smaller community plans can relate to more formal planning processes. The project is designed to research how this can happen, and how it works in practice. AIRS have been approached by five communities; Frant, Maresfield, East Hoathly & Halland, Mayfield and Hellingly.

These communities are renewing their Action Plans with a view to prioritising the issues that they wish to bring to the LSP. The ambition is for resource teams (made up of LSP members) to visit those communities. Three have already completed their reviews, and correspondence continues with Hellingly and Mayfield. The process is helping them gain a better understanding of the LSP, and the communities are enthusiastic at the prospect of working with decision makers.

Nevertheless, there is still some scepticism, but the participating parishes are keen to use the partnership to best possible advantage. They are coming back with some ideas for quick wins, but it is important to appreciate that this is not a kind of 'ambush' on their part. Ambitions must be realistic and achievable. There is also an important role for district councillors, and AIRS is trying to engage them along the way. The project seeks to encourage parishes to join together, whereas previously they were seeking a one-to-one relationship with the LSP. AIRS will contact individual members to feedback issues, and aims to start Resource Team visits in September / October this year. Involvement of LSP partners will be a vital ingredient in the project's success. Teresa will present a further progress report in early autumn.

Ian expressed pleasure at the response from the work so far and encouraged Board Members to respond as meetings are being arranged, but signalled that it is also important that the villages take a sensitive approach rather than simply lobbying for their own case. Teresa flagged the need for honesty in the dialogue between parishes and the LSP.

Partners felt that there should be opportunities for making more of the continuity of interests for example: Health as a theme in the Community Strategy, in the plans and activities of the PCT and other partners (eg ESCC, Freedom Leisure), and in the forward planning represented by the Local Development Framework etc. An observation was also made on whether WALC resource is properly used. WDC also puts in a lot of capacity building to parishes to help them understand the current LDF process.

Pam felt it was important that parishes not on the list who would like to come on board should be encouraged. Paul asked for the project to include e.g. conservation volunteers as it could be an opportunity to extend their involvement on local communities.

Community Sport Network - Diana Carlick

Diana presented a paper on the CSN to the Board. The ambition is to raise participation in sport and other leisure activities by 1%. There have been two meetings of the network to date. It is proposed that the CSN replace the former Cultural Activities and Leisure theme partnership, and terms of reference are being drawn up. Partners queried the apparent focus on sport alone, and Diana explained that other physical activities such as allotments and rambling would also fall within the ambit of the network.

Partners also raised the possibility for greater shared use of local schools in the provision of sports and leisure activities. The Beacon at Crowborough is already active in this way, but partners felt this should be extended to other schools and community colleges. Charlie suggested that Alison Horan might be able to advise on this, and also mentioned that there should be an opportunity to connect with the Children's Trust Area Partnership. Richard mentioned that the PCT is about to appoint 8 Physical Activity Contractors.

The LSP endorsed and welcomed the CSN as a theme partnership of the LSP. The recommendations in the report were agreed.

Local Development Framework – LSP Issues and Options Consultation

Jackie gave a presentation to the meeting on Wealden's LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation paper and explained that Wealden considers public involvement to be vital, even though there is no legal requirement for it at this stage.

David Paine (GOSE) expressed his view that Wealden's involvement of the LSP is exemplary, and though Government Office would observe with great interest, he would be unable to comment on any of the proposals. He was very impressed with the way WDC and the LSP are looking at the options and testing them. Other local authorities have fallen down through not thinking in this way.

Partners discussed the options for each of the District's towns as set out in the Issues and Options paper. Jackie and Caroline recorded this separately, and will provide feedback in due course, but a summary is provided below.

Crowborough

Community cohesion is difficult in Crowborough and there is a risk of development destroying what there already is. The town never really recovered from the building expansion in the 1970s and 1980s. The town has one area of deprivation.

ESFRS advised that they had capacity. Response times would not be an issue. Sussex Police – Crowborough not one of the busiest towns for policing. Should have /capacity. Lisa advised that healthcare would focus primarily on GP provision.

EA unable to comment on specific environment issues without knowing detail but no issues with overall approach.

Heathfield

Education and drainage identified as the key issues. Transport infrastructure also very limited. Health would need to look at figures: Heathfield is close to full capacity but there may be some scope / flexibility within individual surgeries.

No issues from ESFRS or Sussex Police. Sussex Police have recently placed officers at Heathfield and this is working well. Ian commented that from a churches perspective, Heathfield felt strong and cohesive.

Uckfield

Partners agreed on the constraints shown on the slide i.e. traffic congestion, flooding, secondary school capacity, lack of rail link. But, there is capacity in health and drainage. Possible locations are remote from the centre of town.

EA commented that the development needs careful planning and needs to be radical. It should provide infrastructure rather than build upon what is already in place. There is enormous potential, including the possibility for a hospital and improved rail links. Growth would need a significant commitment from many partners to consider the radical approach.

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Hailsham / Polegate

There are no easy options within the towns and lots of tensions.

ESFRS – development in this area represents their biggest concern. Current resources are already stretched. One appliance is based in Hailsham part-time. Significant development would require a new fire station, but might be envisaged given that Herstmonceux would be likely to close.

Sussex Police – similar capacity issues. Hailsham and Uckfield stations both pretty busy because of location. The facilities in Hailsham also serve part of Willingdon and Eastbourne.

Karen (for Community & Voluntary Sector) – need more employment opportunities in Hailsham if it is to be developed. Lack of rail link is also a significant problem. Affordability of housing and social issues are major concerns.

EA – Hailsham water issues also extend to Polegate. Waste water is an absolute constraint.

Other Options

ESFRS expressed concern about the 6 week response window.

Chantal reminded partners that 10% was the maximum level of growth sustainable by Wealden villages in discussions at the 26 April event. Jackie concluded that this is a shared challenge. Currently partners are working to different timescales and challenges. It is important that we try to bring these things together.

Any Other Business

South East England Regional Health Strategy

Lisa advised that the draft strategy is out to consultation until the end of July 2007. There are five key themes:

- Reduction in health inequalities
- Healthy and sustainable communities
- Children and Young People
- Older People
- Employment and Health

Richard will arrange to talk to a number of partners over the coming months and will circulate a summary document electronically [Circulated 16/07/2007]. Feedback would be welcome and will also feed into the commissioning plan.

Meeting Closed at 5.15 approx