

**Notes of the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership
Meeting held on 18 September 2003**

Present:

Fiona Henniker (Chairing) – Sussex Downs & Weald Primary Care Trust
Aprile Biggs (for Peter Midgley) – Environment Agency
Councillor Nigel Coltman – Wealden District Council
Ian Chisnall – Churches Together in Sussex
Mary Coburn – New Downland Housing Association
Nigel Hussey (for Gina Brocklehurst) – Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Trust
John Kelly – Wealden Federation of Voluntary Organisations
Chief Inspector Peter Mills (for CS Paul Pearce) – Sussex Police
Councillor Tony Reid – East Sussex County Council
Councillor Tim Sparrow – Sussex Association of Local Association
Ken Stevens – Federation of Small Businesses
ESFB representative
Charmian Allcock - Wealden District Council
Councillor Pam Doodles - Wealden District Council
Diana Francombe - Wealden District Council
Alison Horan – East Sussex County Council
Councillor Margaret Kirkpatrick - Wealden District Council
Charles Lant - Wealden District Council
Inspector Roland Mockford – Sussex Police
Sean Nolan – East Sussex County Council
Councillor Sylvia Tidy - Wealden District Council

Apologies:

Gina Brocklehurst – Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Trust
Liz Cadman – Sussex Enterprise
Melanie Hunt – Sussex Learning & Skills Council
Jeremy Leggett – Action in Rural Sussex
Peter Midgley – Environment Agency
Chief Superintendent Paul Pearce

1. Visioning Exercise and Plenary Session

The Partners considered the arrangements for the Visioning Exercise in the light of the Audit Commission Report on the LSP, the IdeA Peer Challenge and the forthcoming IdeA Research Project.

a) Audit Commission Report on the Wealden LSP

The Audit Commission had prepared a diagnostic of the Community Strategy in late 2002, followed by a telephone survey of 12 of the strategic partners in March 2003. The overall result was a positive report with ten recommendations for action to improve the process of developing the Community Strategy.

It had been unclear whether the Audit Commission were looking only at the input of the District Council to the Community Strategy or the input of the LSP as a whole. The final report reflected this uncertainty with some recommendations for the District Council and others which affected all the Partners and which would need to be considered at the forthcoming "Visioning" exercise.

Recommendation 1: Identify community groups which are not presently represented in the partnership and ways to contact hard to reach groups

Groups which were currently not represented on the LSP included:

- Young people
- Black and minority ethnic people
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

It was agreed that it would be difficult to identify a relevant person who could represent a whole group, especially at LSP meetings which were probably not the best forum to take into account the needs of hard to reach groups. The Theme Partnerships would be better able to listen to the views of such groups and incorporate particular needs within the Theme Action Plans as appropriate. The website might also be a useful portal for encouraging hard to reach groups to let the LSP have their views.

It was agreed that it might be better to concentrate on reaching one group first, rather than attempting to access several different groups at once. Youth was considered to be a priority. A more productive way to involve young people would be to take information about the Community Strategy to planned events, eg the District Council's annual youth event, rather than try to organise a specific LSP event for youth.

Decision:	To be noted by:
All partners to consider how best to engage with hard to reach groups, particularly young people, and to feed back to the forthcoming Visioning exercise.	All Partners

Recommendation 2: Research gaps in information e.g. community needs, available resources and service availability

It was agreed that it was difficult for the partner organisations to quantify the available resources in fine detail. Information on community resources was widely available through such sites as the East Sussex Community Information Service (www.escis.org.uk). Also East Sussex County Council was initiating a data sharing exercise for the East Sussex Strategic Partnership. It was agreed that it was important to acknowledge the need to keep looking for gaps in the information available.

Recommendation 3: Develop an ongoing role for ward members e.g. in the delivery or monitoring of the LSP objectives or undertaking further consultation

This recommendation was a challenge for Wealden District Council rather than the Partnership. The Council was already involving its Cabinet Members with the Themes but realised it was also important that other 47 members were engaged with the process. However, it was acknowledged that the LSP must not be dominated by District Councillors. The task of each of the representatives on the LSP was to make sure that as many members of the Partner organisations as possible were actively involved.

Recommendation 4: Develop a shorter, clearer, prioritised and SMART Action Plan

This work had already been undertaken to a large extent by the Theme Champions and the finalised action plans were on the LSP's website.

Recommendation 5: Develop suitable performance indicators to measure progress on key objectives and impact of the work of the LSP

The IdeA project and the Visioning exercise would consider appropriate performance measures.

Recommendation 6: Where existing partnerships have incorporated wider LSP themes, ensure the new objectives are given appropriate prominence and that relevant interest groups are represented.

The Theme Progress Reports, due in early 2004, would be able to explore the success or otherwise of the existing Theme Partnership arrangements.

Recommendation 7: Continue to consider the potential for rationalisation of partnerships in line with government guidance.

This had, a few months ago, been set aside as not being one of the highest priorities for the time being.

Recommendation 8: Ensure the partnership remains responsive to community priorities which may not yet have been identified

Remain was the key word as it was considered that the Partnership was a responsive body. The Partners had reasonable confidence that, through the Theme Champions, flexibility was being achieved but the matter would be looked at further when progress was reviewed in the New Year. It was the task of the Theme Champions not only to drive the Action Plans but also to ensure that new needs assessments were taken into account. The LSP meetings and Plenary sessions were useful fora to look across the Themes and identify cross-cutting issues.

Recommendation 9: Continue with and develop consultation of the community

This was interlinked with recommendations 1 and 8. Further consultation was also continuing through the encouragement of Parish Plans.

Recommendation 10: Monitor the continued effectiveness of the LSP, in particular:

- ***The full participation of voluntary organisations***
- ***That the LSP continues to be driven***
- ***That the independence of the LSP is reinforced and opportunities for funding are considered***

The question was raised as to how much the District Council should be the steer and facilitator of the LSP. This was a matter to be considered by the forthcoming Visioning Exercise, including the level of officer support required.

The LSP was board of decision makers rather than an independent decision making body. The next task for the LSP was to consider how the Partner organisations could further combine resources in pursuit of common goals, thus achieving more than any one Partner organisation could achieve on its own. It was not considered to be feasible for the LSP to be a self managed group but there was a need to look at the support capacity required to facilitate and monitor the implementation of all the Action Plans as well as future consultation and the development of the Community Strategy itself.

b) Idea Peer Challenge of Wealden District Council

It was explained that Wealden District Council would undergo Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) by the Audit Commission in November 2003 and, as part of the preparation process, had already undertaken a pilot self-assessment with the Improvement & Development Agency (IdeA).

The IdeA had visited Wealden on 4-6 August 2003 and had subsequently produced a Report which made recommendations and observations relating to certain District Council services such as Planning and Benefits, and also to the Community Strategy.

The development needs identified for the Community Strategy were as follows:

- a. further rationalisation of the action plans and performance monitoring arrangements to ensure public expectations are met;
- b. engagement with hard to reach groups;
- c. resolution of the extent of the Council's role in the LSP and in driving each of the key themes; and
- d. raising staff awareness of the Community Strategy.

c) IdeA Research Project

It was agreed that the proposed project was a great chance to raise the profile of three tier working.

d) Visioning Exercise

It was agreed that the Visioning Exercise needed to consider:

- The role of each of the Partner organisations
- The support requirements of the LSP and the Themes, and how that support could be provided
- Future Development of the Action Plans:
 - Measuring Performance, judging success
 - How to deal with cross-cutting issues
 - Focussing on less, achieving more?
 - “Adding Value” by working together
 - Future consultation needs

Decision:	To be noted by:
It was agreed that the Visioning exercise would be held on 10 December, commencing with a buffet lunch and then a three hour discussion session. The formal LSP meeting would follow at 4pm.	All Partners Secretariat
The Secretariat would canvass for dates for a Plenary Session to be held in early 2004.	Secretariat

2. The Role of the LSP in relation to the receipt of consultation documents

It was agreed at the last meeting on 9 July that consideration was needed of when it was appropriate for the LSP to respond to consultation documents as a body and when it was more appropriate for the individual partners to respond on behalf of their own organisations.

Consultation documents are often sent to the LSP because it is a convenient method of consulting several organisations at once. However, unless the members of the LSP are to become sole conduits for all consultation documents, it will remain important for organisations to receive copies of relevant consultation documents individually.

It was agreed that only in certain circumstances would it be appropriate for the LSP to respond to a consultation paper. These were:

- Where the issue is related to the Community Strategy, is cross-cutting and could affect all or several of the Partners *in the same way*
- Where the proposals directly affect one or more of the objectives or actions in the Community Strategy (eg potentially making it impossible to meet a target or changing a target)

- Where the proposals directly affect the functioning, constitution or membership of the LSP

Decision:	To be noted by:
That consultation documents would be referred to the Chairman for a decision on whether they should be referred to the LSP, based on the criteria listed above.	Fiona Henniker

3. Future Reporting Arrangements for Theme Champions

Decision:	To be noted by:
That two Theme Champions per meeting present a progress report on their Theme at each meeting. The next two meetings would receive reports as follows: 10 December 2003 – Transport and Leisure 18 March 2004 – Environment and Learning	Cllr Tony Reid, Ian Chisnall, Peter Midgley, Melanie Hunt

4. Connecting Communities bid

It was explained that the Connecting Communities bid, which had been the subject of a Report to the 9 July Meeting of the LSP, had been successful.

Sompriti, which had led the bid, would receive around £166,000 over two years to undertake a project which aimed to connect Black and Minority Ethnic residents in East Sussex with local public authorities. One full time and one part time community worker would be recruited for the life of the project and several events would be held in Wealden District. This was an ideal opportunity for the LSP to engage with these hard to reach groups.

5. East Sussex Area Investment Framework

Decision:	To be noted by:
That Tim Sparrow attend the East Sussex Area Investment Framework workshop on 2 October as a representative of the LSP	Tim Sparrow Secretariat

6. Affordable Housing

It was explained that the Government was consulting on its proposals to revise aspects of Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 – Housing (PPG3).

The proposed changes would allow sites in rural areas to be allocated solely for affordable housing. This was an important change as, currently, only a small percentage of any allocation could be set aside for affordable properties. This was off-putting to many villages which, though in need of affordable housing, did not want any more large and expensive properties built.

The amendments were unlikely to be adopted until April 2004 at the earliest. The Wealden Local Plan was already on first deposit and housing allocations under the current PPG3 were currently being considered. The second deposit of the plan was planned to take place prior to April 2004. This meant that there was a very short window of opportunity to include allocations specifically for affordable housing in the rural areas, especially in light of the need to undertake local needs surveys to support any such allocations. The Wealden Housing Partnership would be an

important part of planning and implementing the allocation process, as would the Parish Councils.

The Partners were very supportive of the proposals as the provision of affordable housing was a high priority for the Housing Theme.

7. Two-Tier Action Learning Set

Following the GOSE Two-Tier Working seminar, hosted by East Sussex County Council in July, the LSP had been invited to participate in an action learning set on Two Tier Working in LSPs. The set would examine the collaboration between counties and districts in LSP working and community planning. It was agreed that this was an good opportunity to work with colleagues from other LSPs and share experiences. However, it was important to stress the importance of the Third tier of local government to the Wealden LSP.

8. Any Other Business

(a) Leisure Theme

The development and promotion of horseriding and walking were both included as actions within the Leisure theme action plan. However, it had become clear that there were some tensions between the two interest groups. A meeting was due to be held at 2pm on 27 November and the Theme Champion wished to extend an invitation to anyone with an interest in or knowledge of the issues. It was suggested that the East Sussex County Council Rights of Way Officer be invited and the Superintendent of Ashdown Forest.

(b) Environment Theme Guidance

The Sussex Environment Reference Group had produced some guidance for LSPs on incorporating environmental issues within Community Strategies, including consideration of the cross-cutting nature of many environmental issues.

(c) Community Recycling and Economic Development Programme

Part of the New Opportunities Fund's Transforming Waste Programme, this new funding programme will award £35.2 million in England and Wales to new and existing community based recycling, reuse and composting projects. Application forms and guidance notes were available on www.rsnc.org/cred

(d) Newsletter

One action within the Leisure Theme Action Plan was to produce a Newsletter. However, it was clear that there was a lot of information produced in the form of newsletters throughout the District and it was suggested that perhaps consideration could be given to combining information into a wider publication.

(e) Broadband

The County Council had been working in partnership with BT to increase broadband provision and take up in East Sussex. Provision was now around 80% of exchanges enabled and consideration was being given as to how to deal with the remaining 20% which were mainly rural areas. Satellite and wireless connections were possible solutions. However, despite such good provision, take-up was poor in many areas. It was suggested that business breakfasts might be a forum to explain the benefits to business of the faster connections permitted by Broadband. Events such as the Wealden Trade Fair would also be a forum for educating the public. However, it was pointed out that certain problems, such as the extra cost to keep a fax line open when broadband is used, needed to be tackled by BT.