

## WEALDEN LSP

Minutes of the meeting which took place on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2005

4 pm at Hailsham East Community Centre

### PART 1

#### 1.1 Those attending and apologies for absence:

Members:

Tim Sparrow – Sussex Association of Local Councils (Chairman)  
Ian Chisnall – Churches Together in Sussex  
Mike Rogers – East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service  
Cllr. Nigel Coltman – Wealden District Council  
Sarah Boden - Town and Country Housing Association  
Kathy Fordham - NFU  
Ken Stevens – Federation of Small Businesses  
John Kelly – Wealden Federation of Voluntary Organisations

Also in attendance:

Chris Wick (for Rupert Clubb) – Environment Agency  
Ieuan Sherwood (for Jeremy Leggett) – Action in rural Sussex  
Alison Horan - ESCC  
Jessica Britton (for Fiona Henniker) – Sussex Downs and Weald PCT  
Cllr Chantal Wilson )  
Cllr. Diana Phillips ) WDC Scrutiny Committee  
Cllr. Jim Hollins )  
Dave Glover – WDC  
Graham Arr-Jones - ESCC  
David Phillips – WDC  
Charles Lant – Chief Exec. WDC  
Charmian Allcock – WDC  
Caroline Adcock – LSP Co-ordinator

Apologies for absence:

Cllr Tony Reid – ESCC  
Jeremy Leggett – AirS  
Fiona Henniker – Sussex Downs and Weald PCT  
Sean Nolan – ESCC  
Cllr. Jan Dunk – WDC  
Rupert Clubb – Environment Agency  
Di Wicks – Eastbourne Downs PCT

Tim Sparrow welcome everyone to the meeting and gave a special mention to Cathy Fordham who is a new member of the LSP, replacing her husband Michael Fordham as the NFU representative.

#### 1.3 LAA – impact on work of LSP

Tim Sparrow gave a brief resume of the LAA process and the tight timetable which was required in order to present the draft plan to GOSE on 28<sup>th</sup> September. He praised East Sussex County Council, acting as the accountable body, and the ESSP for all their hard work in consulting as widely as possible given the short time scale.

Alison Horan (co-ordinator for the LAA bid on behalf of ESCC) explained that the LAA was a joint effort on behalf of all districts, boroughs and the county council in East Sussex. It had been developed from the aggregated objectives in each of the Community Strategies and as such, should reflect the wishes of each area. Not all activity is included however, since it must fit with the four main blocks and discussion was still taking place over which priorities and stretch targets should be included.

The final draft will be circulated to all partners following approval by the project board (sub-group of ESSP). Tim explained that three members of Wealden LSP were members of this small steering group. Twenty four hours will then be available for final revisions to the plan before submission to GOSE leaving a couple of months for negotiation before the contract is confirmed by Christmas 2005.

Concerns were raised about the limited involvement of elected representatives.

It was still not clear how the LAA will impact on the community strategies, how revisions of these documents can feed into the LAA agenda and how the activities required to achieve the outputs will be delivered. Partners were also unsure how reward payments would be allocated, who would benefit and when.

The general feeling was that Government policy in relation to LAA's was more suited to unitary authorities and no clear guidelines existed for two tier arrangements.

#### **ACTION**

Caroline to circulate draft to all those on LAA circulation list following the project board meeting on Friday.

Comments to be made to ESCC asap and within next 24 hours if possible.

### **1.4 South East Plan**

David Phillips explained that consultation had just begun on stage two of the South East Plan process. This strategic plan covers a period from now until 2026 and will set the framework for all other plans such as the LDF in each of the districts and boroughs across the South East.

For Wealden the critical issues are around infrastructure and this must be adequate if the influx of new households is to bring any increase in the quality of life for those living and working in the District.

East Sussex County Council is charged with undertaking the consultation process and feeding all responses back to SEERA who will then liaise with Government.

Detailed questionnaires have been issued to all the main stakeholder organizations and Parish Councils. Further copies are available in libraries and public information points.

A public meeting is taking place in Wealden on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October at Uckfield Civic Centre from 7.30pm. Members of the public are encouraged to attend. This follows the next LSP meeting – also taking place at the Uckfield Civic Centre from 4 – 6pm.

A stakeholders event (limited numbers by invitation only) will be held on 4<sup>th</sup> October. Tim Sparrow has been invited to represent Wealden LSP Other partners may attend in their own right.

Feedback from all consultation will be analysed by an independent consultancy and presented to SEERA by 9th December.

Cllr. Nigel Coltman explained that he was the Wealden District Council representative at SEERA meetings and continually pushed for infrastructure to be given a high profile. This will not be provided by the Government and the expectation is that the developer pays. This is only viable if developers can achieve large profits through sale of executive homes. It is not conducive to the provision of affordable dwellings. However, there is a desperate need in Wealden for more affordable units and unless this can be achieved the economy will suffer. Jobs are not being created in the District, in fact there has been a loss in recent months, and additional dwellings can only mean more commuters and/or higher unemployment.

Graham Arr-Jones gave an outline of housing figures over the plan period and explained that 8,000 houses were needed in Wealden in the next 20 years. These will be distributed between the Sussex coastal area (Polegate, Hailsham, Hellingly, Stone Cross and Willingdon – average of 230 units per year) Remainder will be built in the rest of Wealden, mostly in urban areas (average of 170 units per year). SEEDA's priority is that additional housing should improve the economic performance of the area. Major constraints such as large areas of protected landscape and weak infrastructure have been taken into consideration and as a result, the numbers of new units have been considerably reduced from original proposals. They are, in fact, less than the annual average structure plan provision for 1991- 2011 (550 units per year) as well as being less than the annual average building rates (454 units). SEERA are insisting that infrastructure must be in place before new houses are built and this must be defended at the public inquiry stage.

Concerns were raised that most of the housing needed to be affordable. More extreme views suggested that this is a necessary part of social infrastructure and should be provided by Government rather than placing the responsibility on developers.

The definition of appropriate and necessary infrastructure. was also challenged. There was general consensus that this depended on the scale of development and whether it was in a rural or urban setting. Rural housing cannot expect the same degree of access to services and facilities and a sensitive formula needs to be adopted which reflect these differences.

Charles Lant pointed out that infrastructure should also include social and community activity. We need to be aware of this if we are to provide a high quality of life for new communities. This will be a very challenging but not impossible task, especially in the current financial climate when the public sector must work within tighter budgetary controls leaving more and more of this infrastructure to be provided by the private and voluntary sector

Kathy Fordham pointed out the availability of brownfield sites in the countryside ie redundant farm buildings. Should development be excluded here just because there is no immediate access to infrastructure? How can workers access rural employment if all new units are grouped in towns? What compromises are we prepared to make?

Other comments included how we might overcome NIMBE attitudes which prevented the development of affordable housing projects in rural areas,

despite initial enthusiasm in these parishes. Changing perceptions and overcoming the drawbridge mentality is a challenge which the LSP might well take up. Ian Chisnall of Churches Together was enthusiastic in supporting this idea and felt that churches could offer their support. Parish Councils and businesses may also be useful partners in taking this forward.

The challenge for the LSP is to encourage input from partners to identify best fit solutions for new development, taking into consideration all these issues.

#### ACTIONS

Most partners were keen to comment on the South East Plan but no comments from the LSP as an organization in it's own right had been tabled at this stage.

Tim Sparrow suggested that everyone needed time to absorb the information and prepare comments. Further discussion can then take place at the next LSP meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> October and an LSP view may then be prepared for submission to SEERA. In the meantime partners were encouraged to feedback their own comments to the county council.

LSP to consider how they might change perceptions and challenge the NIMBE culture to ensure more affordable homes are welcomed

### 1.5 **Local Development Framework – update**

Progress on the LDF has been delayed pending the result of the Court of Appeal as to what use the Local Plan can be put to until the council moves into the production of new documents under the LDF.

In addition there have been a number of key staff posts vacant.

Both these issues are being addressed and should be resolved in the next couple of weeks.

The Statement of Community involvement is the first of the main LDF documents which will be developed. Consultation will take place to ascertain how communities want to be consulted on all future decisions relating to the LDF.

A questionnaire has been prepared and a project board constituted, with representation from the LSP. Work will begin in the next few weeks on the SCI and this will be followed by significant high priority documents concerning:

Housing and business allocations

Affordable housing

The LDF is seen as the physical manifestation of the Community Strategy which means there is a close affinity with the work of the LSP.

#### ACTION

LSP will be a valuable partner in the consultation process and close working with the LDF is important in relation to a review of the Community Strategy to avoid overlap.

The planning department value input from the LSP to determine best fit options for housing development to ensure all quality of life issues and access to services are taken into consideration.

Elected Members of the District Council will also be encouraged to get involved in the consultation process and contribute to activity of LSP and the LDF.

### **1.8 Current Work Programme**

The allocation of second homes funding has now taken place and projects are being worked up (Details circulated with the agenda) The money has provided a catalyst to stimulate partnership working and in many instances has levered in considerable extra funding and brought partners together to deliver cross cutting activity.

#### **ACTION**

Further reports to the LSP will follow and successful activity will be highlighted If anyone would like further information about any of the projects, please contact Caroline

#### **Website**

This was now up and running following a major overhaul. All information, including agendas and minutes, will be posted on the website and members are encouraged to visit it regularly.

Theme groups are also offered a page to post information of their choice. Contact Caroline with any comments or requests for additions to the site.

## **PART 2**

### **2.1 Environment and Sustainability**

Chris Wick (standing in for Rupert Clubb) gave a brief overview of the new draft action plan which had been circulated with the agenda. It was clear that many of the objectives were also shared by other themes and this needs to be clarified. Tasks need firming up with each one being allocated a lead agency to take responsibility for delivering the output in partnership with others as appropriate

Alison Horan pointed out there were a number of shared objectives in the LAA ie Fly tipping, abandoned cars, graffiti, cleaner, safer, greener open space, waste management, water conservation.

The discussion covered a broad range of issues including problems of poor maintenance of grass verges and spread of weeds such as ragwort, use of grey water in new housing developments, use of local materials in new housing and value of development control to achieve high levels of sustainability and good design in the private sector. The meeting also felt there was a need to encourage environmental education in relation to issues such as waste management to encourage next generation to be fully aware of these issues (Wealden cannot expand it's own CROWN recycling scheme as it has used up credits and can only encourage private efforts to recycle.)

Use of local products and services was also encouraged eg public procurement policies, selling local products to the general public etc.

Concerns were voiced however about the measurement used to indicate a high quality environment ie degree of tranquility in rural areas This may preclude a number of farming activities and yet farmers are key to maintaining the countryside.

Dave Glover then spoke about the development of a strategy for the provision and maintenance of Open Space. This was included in the CPA and was being worked up using the CABE good practice guide. The first task was to agree a definition for open space which could include all land which was not privately owned. An audit of existing provision for sport and recreation was well underway and could inform the future strategy. Mention was made of the ESCC document – “Improving the Public Realm”. Most of the Parish Plans received to date has also included a number of concerns about the environment and open space which could be fed into the strategy. The LSP is keen to identify issues of widespread concern to communities taken up the statutory agencies and taken forward. This would seem to provide an ideal opportunity to honor that commitment

The strategy had not yet been considered by officers or the cabinet but the LSP agreed that it was something which could take forward the objectives in the Environment Action Plan. Additional powers were now in place through recent legislation to tackle anti-social behaviour, litter etc. Resource implications would ensue but maybe achieved through external funding and grant aid.

The meeting agreed that proper care of the environment, especially around the entrance to towns could do much to address public perception and satisfaction. Others felt that personal responsibility for privately owned land was important and suggested that small initiatives to incentivise private owners can make a big difference eg tool pools, garden competitions.

#### **ACTION**

Meeting to be arranged for Theme champions to discuss how they might best deliver the aims and objectives outlined in their action plan  
Also how they might contribute to objectives in action plans of the environment theme, which is recognized as a cross cutting issue with widespread links to all LSP partners. Environment Agency to offer guidance to other theme champions as to how they might deliver this activity

Getting the message across to the general public was an important activity. This could be done in a number of ways including the use of cultural and arts groups and opportunities to encourage best practice.

### **PART 3**

#### **3.1 Future working and structure of LSP**

A number of changes such as the LAA process and partnership resourcing has led to implications for the LSP which suggest a review of current delivery arrangements.

Some themes work well and indeed their partnerships have been in existence before the LSP was set up eg health and social care, Others were put together to deliver the community strategy eg leisure, and do not have resources of their own.

The Cultural partnership has have recently expressed concerns about the degree to which officer support will continue and has put theme meetings on hold until early next year

Unsupported partnerships, especially if they are largely made up of the voluntary sector have always provided a challenge in terms of resourcing. Project funding may offer short term relief but there is usually no attempt at succession planning or long term sustainability. A small amount of money for the partnership to work towards its objectives has also been of great benefit and without this it is hard to expect partners to share their budgets or take on extra tasks.

Councils are under an increasing strain to trim their costs and are left with no option but to put their statutory functions first. This does not mean that they do not value partnership working and indeed are keen to make every effort for it to continue. Once the medium term financial strategy has been worked out, officers will be in a better position to confirm the degree to which they can offer time to the theme groups, even if rationalisation is necessary.

The LSP may like to consider the need to top slice a small amount of second homes money to provide admin support to struggling theme groups who have no recourse to funds of their own

Some themes maybe better addressed at a county or sub-county level if those with key responsibilities for delivering that theme operate over a wider area that Wealden district eg transport, learning. This does not preclude the need for a theme champion at the district level.

Any re-organisation of the themes may also take into account the LAA blocks

#### **ACTION**

Meeting to be arranged between Tim Sparrow and Theme champions to address how each one can best address the achievement of objectives in their action plan, where the focus should be , what resources exist or can be levered in and how themes can work together to achieve shared objectives.

LSP to consider how best to allocate second homes money in the next financial year to take on board issues raised and allow sufficient time for sensible and creative use of funds to develop partnership working.

## **PART 4**

### **4.1 Any other business**

Mike Rogers informed the meeting that additional funding for partnership working maybe forthcoming from the Fire Service in the next financial year providing budgets were not slimmed down too much

### **4.2 Date, time and place of future meetings**

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October at 4pm**

**CHANGE OF USUAL VENUE – MEETING AT UCKFIELD CIVIC CENTRE**

Followed by a public meeting of South East Plan in the main hall at 7.30pm to which all are invited.

**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November at 4pm**

**ALSO AT UCKFIELD CIVIC CENTRE**

Following the Annual Parish Conference for Wealden parishes.