

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership which took place on Wednesday 8 September 2004

Present:

Mary Coburn, New Downland Housing Association
Ian Chisnall, Churches Together in Sussex
Cllr Nigel Coltman, Wealden District Council
Teresa Gittens, Action in Rural Sussex
Fiona Henniker, Sussex Downs & Weald Primary Care Trust
John Kelly, Wealden Federation of Voluntary Organisations
Chief Inspector Rex Matthews, Sussex Police
Tim Sparrow, Sussex Association of Local Councils
Peter Swann, East Sussex Learning Partnership

Also Attending:

Charmian Allcock, Wealden District Council
Cllr Norman Buck, Wealden District Council
Mary Clare Deane, Wealden District Council
Cllr Mrs Pam Doodes, Wealden District Council
Diana Francombe, Wealden District Council
Tara Gausden, Wealden District Council
Amanda Hodge, Wealden District Council
Alison Horan, East Sussex County Council
Dr Jeremy Leach, Wealden District Council
Sean Nolan, East Sussex County Council
Cllr Mrs Di Phillips, Wealden District Council
Cllr Mrs Sylvia Tidy, Wealden District Council

Apologies:

Aprile Biggs, Environment Agency
Julia Brown, Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Trust
Cllr Tony Reid, East Sussex County Council

The LSP was advised that Julia Brown would be replacing Dr Richard Brighton as the representative of Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Trust and that Peter Swann, Principal of Beacon Community College, Crowborough and Member of the East Sussex Learning Partnership, was replacing Denise Reynard as the representative attending on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council.

1. Reports of the Theme Champions

(a) Learning Theme

Peter Swann, Head of Beacon Community College, was introduced as the new representative of the East Sussex Learning Partnership (ESLP) and Champion of the Learning Theme.

The ESLP Business Plan and Action Plan were distributed, together with the updated Wealden Learning Action Plan.

Peter explained that the ESLP had been constituted in 1999 in order to develop partnership working to deliver the Learning and Skills Council's Business Plan for post-16 learning in East Sussex. One of the particular priorities being pursued in Wealden was to promote Level 2 Skills.

He also chaired the Heathfield, Uplands, Uckfield and Beacon Community Colleges partnership (HUUB). HUUB wanted to work with Sussex Downs College to develop a Skills Centre in Uckfield that would provide young people with the opportunity to develop hands-on experience and undertake vocational qualifications. This was a key issue for Wealden as many young people wanted to be able to stay in Wealden while they undertook qualifications and also wanted to develop skills which would enable them to later find work in the local area.

The following issues were discussed:

- That the role of the ESLP was to play a brokerage role, leveraging in funding and encouraging partners to join together to deliver projects.
- That many schools were now working with parents as it was vital to gain their support for new learning opportunities.
- That linking work around learning and child protection was a valuable way of improving educational standards and one for the LSP to consider further in the future.
- That the ESLP had members from the business community and that links were made where possible with local businesses, including in the development of the proposed Skills Centre.
- That the ESLP was to become a limited company and was, in effect, an arm of the Learning and Skills Council. It was accountable to its funding bodies.
- That the Partnership Co-ordinator, when appointed, would liaise with the Theme Champion to audit the Learning Action Plan and develop new projects.

(b) Housing Theme

Mary Coburn, Chief Executive of Downland Housing Association, and Champion of the Housing Theme gave a presentation that set the context for the provision of social housing in Wealden and explained some of the work that was ongoing.

She explained that housing associations were "Not for profit" organisations regulated by the Housing Corporation. They had to comply with strict guidelines including achieving target rents and the Decent Homes Standard. They developed affordable new homes for families as well as sheltered and supported accommodation. Properties were rented or provided on a shared ownership basis.

Government Housing Policy encouraged the development of sustainable communities with housing provision for key workers such as nurses and teachers and promoted modern methods of construction. The Wealden Housing Development Partnership comprised the District Council and

Downland, Raglan, Town and Country and Warden Housing Associations and sought to deliver the Wealden Housing Strategy.

The main issue in Wealden was the high average cost of housing. In April/June 2004 an average family house cost £236,244, which would require a combined income of £67,000 to support the purchase. However, numbers on the housing waiting list were probably much lower than the number of people who were in housing need as many people priced out of the market might have relatively high incomes and thus not consider themselves as eligible for social housing.

SEEDA's Regional Economic Statement cited the provision of affordable Housing as being a critical issue. Lack of housing is a threat to sustainable growth and affects the ability of business to attract and retain staff. The target for affordable homes to be built in Wealden was 170 per annum but the actual built was around 62 per annum. However, Wealden District Council was currently running a rural housing project "Housing Our People" (HOPE) in partnership with Parishes to find suitable sites for affordable housing in villages. The target was to provide 150 to 300 new affordable homes in the District.

Issues that needed to be addressed in future were improving communication between the LSP and the Wealden Housing Partnership, mapping joint working groups and work on development of extra care schemes.

2. Projects

(a) Update on partnership manager

Four credible applications had been received from employees within three of the Partner organisations for the Partnership Co-ordinator post and interviews would take place on the 16 September. The full year cost to the LSP, including salary and direct overheads, would be around £39,000. The District Council would fund indirect overheads plus provide managerial, administrative and back-up support.

(b) Financial assistance for Village Action Plans

The LSP was reminded that it had already encouraged Parish Plan preparation, through monies made available by Wealden District Council, by awarding grants of £500 to 19 Parishes to assist in their feasibility studies and applications for Countryside Agency (CA) funding. However, that CA funding stream had ceased. It was therefore proposed that a further £10,000 be made available to provide grants of up to £1,500 for those Parishes which had been unable to access funding elsewhere.

Agreed:

1. That the LSP makes £10,000 available to provide grants of up to £1,500 for Parishes to pursue their Parish Plans, subject to:
 - match funding from the local community; and
 - evidence that other possible sources of funding have been fully explored, including "Awards for All" funding from the Lottery.

2. That authority be delegated to the Chairman to agree the awards.

(c) Village Action Plans Support Programme

As requested at the last meeting, Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) had provided further information in support of its proposed programme to assist ten villages in Wealden with the development and implementation of their Village Action Plans. Costs were estimated at around £20,000 per annum for the duration of the project (expected to amount to three years).

Some concern was expressed that AiRS already received funding from local authorities in East Sussex to undertake similar work. Any LSP funding must, therefore, be demonstrably for additional work.

Agreed:

1. That the LSP will fund the Village Action Plans Support Programme for one year, on a pilot basis, at a cost of £20,000, subject to:
 - Demonstration, to the satisfaction of the Chairman, that the proposed programme of work does not duplicate work already being funded by the local authority Partners; and
 - Agreement with the Chairman on the measurable outcomes that must be achieved from the project.
2. That, at the end of the year, the LSP will review the outcomes of the project and consider whether to approve a further year of funding.

(d) Wealden Youth Matters Website

At its last meeting the LSP had agreed to fund development of a Wealden Youth Matters website subject to the provision of satisfactory further information.

A budget breakdown over the duration of the project was provided and, in answer to a question it was confirmed that Hailsham Community College was engaged in the development of the site and that the project team included members who had been involved in the development of the Wealden Business Help website. Some work had already been undertaken with young people to determine whether they would use the site and what content would be of interest.

Agreed:

1. That the LSP confirms its grant of £25,000 to Wealden District Council to develop a Wealden Youth Matters website.

e) Environmental Axis Project

It was confirmed that the Environment Theme Partnership would be working on the development of this project but that any bid for funds was now likely to come forward in the next financial year.

In light of the above, the Partnership was reminded that all but £2,000 of the £101,000 funding provided by the increased yield from tax payable on second homes had now been provisionally allocated, as follows:

£39,000 (two years)	Partnership Co-ordinator
£25,000 (one off)	Development of Wealden Youth Matters website
£ 5,000 (one off)	Access and Citizenship for under 13s
£10,000 (one off)	Grant funding to undertake Village Action Plans in the light of withdrawal of the funding stream previously available from the Countryside Agency
£20,000 (one year pilot)	Support, through Action in Rural Sussex, to implement Village Action Plans

3. Area Investment Framework

The AIF Sub-Group had operated on a virtual basis and had considered and endorsed five project bids on behalf of the LSP so that they could now go to SEEDA for consideration:

- Prince's Trust - £23,750 per annum for two years to support young entrepreneurs in Wealden and Lewes District.
- Plumpton CoVE (Centre of Vocational Excellence) - £100k in 2004/5 to develop business training suites in Plumpton and Netherfield.
- EDEAL/1066 Enterprise - £60K (inc £10K from ESCC) per year for two years to develop rural business uptake of business advice services.
- Broadband East Sussex (BES) Programme - £30k (including £15k match funding) to encourage businesses to undertake ICT needs analysis and to provide advice.
- Broadband East Sussex Mobile Broadband - to provide a flexible, mobile resource that complements the fixed Help Point and kiosk infrastructure through Access East Sussex.

The East Sussex Economic Partnership (ESEP) was now seeking comments on the AIF Targets and Priorities being put forward for 2005/06. A paper was circulated which set out the proposed framework for allocating AIF funds during the next financial year. The paper had been discussed in workshops at the ESEP event on Monday 6 September. Any further comments from Partners were requested to be put directly to Nigel Pargiter at the County Council by Friday 10 September.

As well as comments on the content, some members suggested that it would be appropriate to comment on the development and consultation processes, particularly in relation to timescales, so that, if necessary, these could be improved in future.

4. Regional and National Sustainable Development Strategies

The LSP received a report which explained that an Integrated Regional Framework (IRF) for the South East had been launched in June 2004 which provided a policy framework for the region to achieve economic development that benefited people and protected and improved the environment. The Government had also launched a consultation document on sustainable development, "Taking It Forward", in early 2004.

It was clear from these documents that Community Strategies were now considered to be the main focus for promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas. In the future it was likely that the LSP will be expected to increasingly take responsibility for sustainable local development and to strengthen its links with regional and national strategies.

Thus, the LSP was advised that it might wish to consider the Regional and National Strategies for Sustainable Development in future reviews of targets and indicators so that, where appropriate, local indicators complemented wider policy objectives.

5. Any Other Business

a) East Sussex Strategic Partnership Meeting

The ESSP had held a progress meeting on 6 September. One issue which arose was the need to join up activity where appropriate across the different LSPs, for example rural transport initiatives. The building of trust and improving communications was essential to avoid conflicts and duplication.

There was a meeting of LSP Chairs planned for 7 October which, it was proposed, could start to consider protocols for joint working to improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and increase mutual understanding.

b) Sub-Regional Strategy for the Sussex Coast

The South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) had commissioned the preparation of a sub-regional strategy for the Sussex Coast. Further details of the brief and proposed process would be circulated to Partners by email following the meeting.

c) "Moving Past" Gypsies and Travellers Events

John Kelly advised the Partners of two events, to be held at the Uckfield Civic Centre, examining the culture and history of gypsies and travellers. The first was a talk by Janet Keet-Black at 7.30pm on 16 September entitled "Gypsy and Traveller Roots in Sussex and Kent". The second was an exhibition being held between 10.00am and 4.00pm on 17 September.

d) Consultation Protocol

Tim Sparrow questioned why Wealden District Council had circulated information related to its Medium Term Financial Strategy to the LSP for comments when the LSP had agreed that it would only consider, as a body, those issues which affected the work of the LSP or impacted on all Partners in the same way. It was explained that the papers had been sent with the intention that each Partner organisation comment individually, in line with the Consultation Protocol. The District Council apologised that this had not been made clear enough in the covering letter.

e) LSP Chairs Meeting – 7 October

Fiona Henniker was unfortunately unable to attend the Chairs meeting due to a prior engagement. It was agreed that Tim Sparrow would attend in her place.

f) Chairmanship

In answer to a question it was explained that, when the present Chairman stood down, nominations would be invited from Partners for a new Chair. If more than one nomination was made and seconded, a ballot would be held. The Partnership was reminded that, at its last meeting, it had agreed that the present Chairman would remain in position until the new Partnership Co-ordinator was in post to ensure continuity. This meant that nominations for a new Chair were likely to be invited at the next meeting on 8 December 2004.

The meeting ended at 6.20pm