

## **Report of Wealden Local Strategic Partnership event: Engaging with local business 8 April 2009: East Sussex National**

### **Background**

The event had been arranged with funding from *Progress through Partnership* to consider how the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) could provide support for local businesses and, in turn, how businesses may be able to help take forward the Sustainable Community Strategy for Wealden. Primarily the purpose was to provide an opportunity for networking with businesses and support organisations with the aim of open discussion, information and opinion sharing that would lead to greater engagement between all attendees in the future.

A list of attendees is set out at Annex A.

Discussions began with short presentations to set the context, dealing with, first, LSPs and the Sustainable Community Strategy, and second, the Local Development Framework. Summaries of each of these is set out at Annex B.

The presentations were followed by table discussions to debate the issues affecting business in more detail and to explore ways in which the LSP can engage with them. The session was run twice; once in the morning and once in the afternoon. There were four separate tables in the morning and one table in the afternoon. A summary of the points raised is set out below.

### **Summary of discussions**

Discussions fell into two main themes: issues around the Local Development Framework and consultation on the Core Strategy; and more general discussion about the issues facing local businesses and how these may be addressed through the LSP. On the former, there was general agreement that the views of business would be a vital input into any consultation about the Core Strategy. However, any engagement with businesses would need careful facilitation to ensure their views were captured. On the LDF more generally, there was a clear consensus that this presented an opportunity to tackle some of the longer term issues facing businesses - such as provision of industrial sites/units and high quality office space to help enhance employment/entrepreneurial opportunities; more affordable housing to enable people (i.e. a viable, diverse workforce) to remain in the District; and to try and address poor transport infrastructure. There was also the possibility of embedding more sustainable practices, for example, local energy generation.

On the issues facing local business, it was clear that transport links and accessibility are a common concern. There were also issues about businesses - particularly the very small and the self-employed - being out of the loop and consequently they can find it difficult to know where and how to access support. Inflexible planning policies and conservative attitudes to innovation were also raised as areas that impact on

business development. The LSP may be able to help in addressing some of these concerns - for example, championing the issues raised and coordinating partners activities to maintain support for the local economy. There may also be scope for helping to develop a directory of local businesses and to map out what support is available. There was recognition that, whilst business welcomed the opportunity to engage on an ad hoc basis, regular and ongoing commitment was difficult for many to maintain. The LSP's best method of engagement probably remained via the FSB and Chambers of Commerce, accompanied by occasional wider engagement on particular issues - such as the LDF Core Strategy. However, the LSP should try and facilitate links between businesses and local partnerships and consider whether the Wealden Business Forum can be reinvigorated.

A table setting out the individual points raised in discussions is at Annex C.

## **Next Steps**

Some of those attending expressed a willingness to engage with the LSP on a regular basis. These offers will be followed up with the individuals concerned. Points raised at the event will be considered by the LSP Board and any particular ideas or suggestions taken forward where possible. The LSP will continue to maintain its links with local businesses through the FSB and will try to build on these where opportunities arise. The consultation exercise on the LDF Core Strategy will include a forum specifically for local businesses.

A summary of the evaluation forms completed is set out at Annex D.

## Annex A

## Attendees

Name	Organisation
Kary Backhouse	Pluspoint Management
Neil Banks	Wealden District Council
Bob Beard	East Sussex Fire and Rescue
Jon Breeds	
Sandra Bultitude	Wealden District Council
Ian Chisnall	Churches in Sussex
Cllr Jane Clark	Elysium Ltd
Kate Crittall	Edeal
Anne Crone	Warr Partnership
Chris Dillon	CD services
Lucy Dixon-Thompson	East Sussex County Council
Maurice Fitzhugh	Federation of Small Businesses
Linda Francis	Wealden LSP
Val Frost	Eagle Research
David Gadsby	David Gadsby Photography
Trevor Goldsmith	Heathfield Chamber of Commerce
John Grange	Business Link
Chris Hutchinson	Ceewhy Vancouver
Tim Ison	Wealden District Council
William King	Wealden LSP
Kerry Kyriacou	Business Link
Glenn Moore	GM Associates
Paul Myles	Radical Lewes Promotions
Mrs P Myles	Material Matters
Simon Ottway	Waitrose Crowborough
Alan Sallows	Alan Sallows Associates
Ted Shaw	Edward Jones Ltd
Cllr Rupert Simmons	Heathfield Partnership
Tony Slack	Crowborough Partnership
Michael Smith	Hogarths Business Services
Ken Stevens	Federation of Small Businesses
Mary Stevenson	Mary Stevenson Garden Design
John Tolley	Heathfield Partnership
Chantal Wilson	Chairman, Wealden District Council

## Annex B

**Local Strategic Partnerships** are a collection of organisations and representatives coming together voluntarily to work in partnership. In East Sussex there are LSPs at both county and district level - six in all.

A LSP:

- brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together;
- is a non-statutory partnership;
- provides a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other partnerships can operate;
- is responsible for developing and driving the implementation of Sustainable Community Strategies;

**The Sustainable Community Strategy** sets out a long term - up to 2026 - vision for the future of Wealden, reflecting local priorities according to local views and taking into account evidence about the local area. The strategy is fundamental to the work of the LSP and is taken into account by partners in creating their own plans.

All local authorities have a duty to work with partner organisations to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS): the document sets out how local organisations and agencies will work together to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area whilst safeguarding the prospects of future generations. The Wealden SCS was first developed in 2002 and further refined in 2008 to form part of the East Sussex Integrated Sustainable Community Strategy - 'Pride of Place' - adopted by all six East Sussex LSPs and published in June 2008.

The Wealden SCS comprises eight themes, each setting out a number of priorities for action to ensure the overall vision is achieved. For the prosperity theme, the priorities are:

- Support existing and emerging businesses in order to encourage a thriving range of sectors which will provide more employment opportunities as a prerequisite for enhancing quality of life in Wealden;
- Encourage small, clean, high-skill businesses with minimal transport needs, e.g. the knowledge-based sector;
- Encourage a balanced approach between residential use and new or existing business sites, for example, by encouraging a more sympathetic approach to the conversion of redundant farm buildings for alternative business uses;
- Support efforts to ensure that adequate employment opportunities are in place or under development where more houses are to be built;
- Ensure that appropriate support and infrastructure is available for the small and micro businesses which tend to predominate in the area;

- Encourage partners to ensure the five core towns are attractive as local retail and service centres;
- Encourage business links with existing colleges and universities through the provision of outreach and business centres attached to those institutions, for example to develop more apprenticeship opportunities locally;
- Improve links between business and the local community for example, by encouraging local businesses to employ local people, encouraging and supporting flexible working patterns and measures to include people with disabilities;
- Develop use of broadband, particularly for electronic communication and websites, and encourage more active networking amongst local businesses;
- Establish a mechanism to lead, in partnership, the Eastbourne / Hailsham Triangle in a single co-ordinated approach, to ensure that it is not simply a growth area for residential development but contributes to the economic growth of the region.

**The Local Development Framework (LDF)** forms part of a new spatial planning system tasked to deliver positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. It requires planners to actively collaborate with the wide range of stakeholders and agencies that help to shape local areas and deliver local services. Plans are drawn up with community involvement and present a shared vision and strategy of how the area should develop.

The cornerstone of the LDF is the Core Strategy. This sets out the spatial vision and broad outlines for development in the widest sense, taking into account the Sustainable Community Strategy and the views of citizens and local stakeholders. Like the SCS, the LDF sets out a long term vision of the future shape of Wealden in 2026.



## Annex C

<b>Issues raised in table discussions</b>		
<b>Local Strategic Partnership</b>	<b>Local Development Framework</b>	<b>Other</b>
<p>Lack of representation across business sectors - notably banking.</p> <p>Wealden Business Forum had had real benefits - should be reinvigorated.</p> <p>Need to facilitate/encourage inward investment; and especially transport infrastructure.</p> <p>Encourage flexible planning.</p> <p>Coordinate activities/initiatives to ensure coherent support for local economy - transport, housing, education, etc.</p> <p>Enable voice for business to influence policy.</p> <p>Scope for facilitating a 'virtual network' - emailing information/newsletter for local businesses.</p> <p>Enable directory of local businesses/suppliers to facilitate local sourcing.</p> <p>Facilitate links between businesses and local partnerships.</p> <p>Provide a map/guide setting out what and where help is available - especially useful to micro business/self-employed.</p> <p>Need to focus on what works - existing networks of support/engagement - not try to create new ones.</p>	<p><b>i) Consultation</b></p> <p>Town and parish councils are appropriate channel for feeding in to consultation.</p> <p>Business would need plenty of advance notice - say 6 weeks - prior to being consulted. Send out invitations via Chambers of Commerce, FSB, Business Networks. Business breakfast perhaps best timing - but will need to be carefully facilitated.</p> <p>What would be outcome for businesses of engaging in LDF consultation.</p> <p>Need 'road show' for businesses.</p> <p>Need clear clarification of role to enable businesses to engage - long term vision outside their norm.</p> <p><b>ii) General issues</b></p> <p>Infrastructure - transport; energy generation; water etc will be crucial.</p> <p>Limited industrial units/sites - along with poor infrastructure make it difficult for business to relocate to/or set up in Wealden.</p> <p>Need to allow capacity for business to expand - should not release business sites for housing.</p> <p>Need high quality office space - can this be found/located in towns or should it be located in rural areas.</p> <p>Impact of out of town centres on high street businesses.</p> <p>Need affordable housing for local workforce.</p> <p>Allow for/encourage local energy generation.</p> <p>Should not just be about houses - needs to reflect provision of adequate services/employment.</p> <p>'Futureproof' - opportunity to enhance sustainability, e.g. home based working; local sourcing; strengthen communities.</p> <p>Need to acknowledge probable continuing pattern of people working outside the district - not all residents will/can work within Wealden.</p>	<p>Visitor economy has vital role.</p> <p>Can villages remain viable/sustainable - can businesses, schools, infrastructure be provided.</p> <p>Rigid and inflexible planning policies frustrate business initiative/innovation: And need to allow more freedom on business design.</p> <p>How do businesses know how to get involved.</p> <p>Lack of central government investment.</p> <p>Impact of business rates.</p> <p>Overall appearance of affluence in Wealden hides real needs for external funding/targeted support.</p> <p>Role of East Sussex County Council in providing overall strategy for business/economy support needs to be matched by delivery/accountability at District/Parish/Town level.</p> <p>Diversity and therefore different requirements between North and South of district.</p> <p>Will always be faced with the 'pull' of external employment centres - London, Brighton, Tunbridge Wells.</p>

## **Annex D**

### **Summary of evaluation forms**

Of those who completed the forms, 70% agreed that the debate and table discussions were useful, and 78% agreed that businesses could benefit from engagement with the LSP. 66% agreed that the LSP would be better able to engage with business as a result of the event and 78% would attend similar events in the future. 89% agreed that the venue was suitable.