

NOTE OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE RURAL AFFAIRS FORUM MEETING HELD AT SHUTTLEWORTH COLLEGE ON 20 NOVEMBER 2007

Attending

Mark Smith - CVS Mid and North Beds
John Thomas - Learning & Skills Council
Sarah Hughes – Beds County Council, Economic Growth Group
David Morgan – Beds & Cambs Rural Support Group
Ann Lovesey – Beds Association of Town and Parish Councillors & Beds County Federation of WIs
Alex Francis – Beds & Luton Economic Development Partnership
Nicola Lee – Beds County Council – Children’s Centres Team
Raksha Patel – Beds County Council – Children’s Centres Team
Anthony Davison – BigBarn
Paula Grayson – Bell Consultancy
Rachel Beadling – Bidwells
Matthew O’Brien – Beds FWAG
Sandra Einon – Mid Beds District Council
Tracey James – GO East
Jon Boswell – BRCC
Martin Westerby – Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust
Jane Markham – BRAF

1. Welcome

David Morgan chaired and welcomed members and guests to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Graham Bellamy, John Scott, Anita Lewis, Monica Robinson, Diane Budd, Rachel Carrington, Anne-Marie Hamilton, Linda Willis, Janet Ridge, Jon Balaam, Susan Garbutt, Tracey Allen, Lisa Roberts, Ann Collett-White, Laurent Martial

3. Notes of the 12 September meeting and matters arising

The note was agreed as an accurate record.

Item 3 - Alex will make the MORI report on Bedfordshire’s image available **Action: Alex**

Item 12 - Review of RSCP. The meeting to look at succession funding has not yet been set up. Jane will contact the steering group and others who wanted to be involved with a view to a meeting in December. **Action: Jane**

4. Business planning – report from the steering group

Jane reported on the last Steering Group meeting on 31 October. Much of the meeting had been spent looking in detail at the draft expression of interest for the RDPE Leader funding. On other items:

Rural Social and Communities Programme. The report on the 2nd quarter’s activities and expenditure had not given reason to predict an underspend this year. Demand for parish plan grants will exceed the pot of £18,719. £10,560 had been spent to date this year, and applications totalling around £10-16k in value were expected to be received for the February round.

However, as previously reported, an underspend of £13,647 had been rolled over from 06/07. £6123 of this had been provisionally earmarked by the steering group for the Rural Housing Enabler activity as there had been an expectation that there might be a shortfall in match funding. This match funding had now been secured. The steering group had agreed that the underspend should be reallocated towards existing activities: Activity 1 (BRAFF) – some additional funding to contribute to costs of facilitating the Leader bid (eg venue costs), small amount for pulling together a good practice guide

on climate change for rural communities (an action arising from the BRAF conference); Activity 2(parish plans) – increase the size of the parish plan pot; Activity 3 (Access) – funding towards costs of E-Rural bus.

Alex Francis suggested that GO East should be approached to see if there was underspend elsewhere in the region that Bedfordshire could access. **Action: Tracey James will raise with GO East colleagues.**

Rural evidence base There had been discussion on strengthening the rural evidence base, and opportunities for county council and Investing in Communities funding was to be explored.

BRAF conference priorities With regard to the three actions that the last BRAF meeting had agreed should be taken forward following the BRAF Conference:

1. Parish plans – the proposed workshop would now be in the New Year. **Action: Jane to convene a group to plan the workshop. Any members interested in being part of the group to let Jane know.**
2. Good practice guide for communities on climate change – plan is to produce an inexpensive guide to share examples from around the county. **Action: All members to let Jane know of any suitable examples around the county.**
3. Year of Food and Farming – BRAF will support where it can (see update below)

Rural-proofing activities A number of strategies were currently out for consultation.

1. Regional Enterprise Strategy. Jane would as a minimum submit something by the 26 November deadline to reflect the discussions on skills that had taken place at the July BRAF meeting. Paula Grayson suggested that Bedfordshire could be a hub for learning and improving the knowledge economy.
2. Mid Beds Core Strategy – Jane had circulated the response she had submitted.
3. Mid Beds Community Plan – BRAF had been approached to rural-proof the revision of the plan. **Action: Jane will circulate an initial draft to BRAF members for comment** as there was unlikely to be time to convene a meeting.
4. Review of Joint Economic Development Strategy for Beds & Luton. Jane had attended the recent consultation workshop and would continue to have an input.

David Morgan noted the work that went on between BRAF meetings, and expressed thanks for the rural-proofing work that Jane had carrying out on the forum's behalf. He felt that BRAF was making a difference.

5. Update on RDPE Greensand Ridge Leader bid (full presentation is on BRAF website)

Jon Boswell presented the draft expression of interest. There was a broad base of support. 45 people had attended the 19 November workshop and 20 organisations had confirmed they wished to be part of the Local Action Group so far, with a 25%:75% public/private split. He gave an overview of economic, social and environmental features of the area. The outline Local Delivery Strategy set out in the expression of interest included sustaining the agri-food sector, sustainable woodland management, tourism development, the knowledge economy, rural communities, heritage and local character, green infrastructure.

The application would be for around £3m. A further £3m would need to be found from private sources (business, individuals, trusts and foundations). Public sector funds (including lottery funding) could be used to supplement Leader funding but could not count as match funding. In-kind funding could be counted in some circumstances.

On management and governance, the proposal was for a Local Action Group that would meet quarterly. The criteria was that public sector representation should be a maximum of 50% of the LAG. Day to day management and project approval would be by a smaller steering group, meeting monthly. The accountable body proposed was BRCC, which would employ supporting staff. Field staff would help bring projects forward.

The following points were raised by BRAF members in the discussion:

- Need to be explicit in the expression of interest about reducing/capturing carbon
- Possible sources of funding included Unilever Trust and other trusts and it would be useful to approach some before the full bidding stage.
- Links to Tastes of Bedfordshire
- Was an audit of diversity of agriculture needed.
- If the Chilterns bid was successful, some EEDA funding would be spent alongside SEEDA funding.

Jon will circulate the third draft of the expression of interest next week and comments would be welcome in good time to allow for it to be submitted to EEDA by 10 December. **Action: Jon/all**

It was agreed that other contacts in EEDA, Forestry Commission, Natural England should be alerted to the prospective bid. **Action: Alex to inform EEDA Partnership Manager for Bedfordshire. Matthew O'Brien to send to Forestry Commission contact. Jon to send Matthew a brief for BCC Director of Planning meeting with Regional Director of CLA.**

6. Update from East of England Rural Forum (EERF)

Ann Lovesey reported on the 19 September meeting. The Chair had reported on his meeting with the new Defra minister, Hilary Benn. The minister had 3 top priorities – affordable housing, skills and learning, migrant workers. He was also interested in rural-proofing and planning issues. The Commission for Rural Communities had also been present, and felt that the regional forums should work more closely with them, particularly regarding the Sub national Review, rural proofing and input into the corporate plan.

A presentation by the CLA and Environment Agency had looked at the future of water resources in the region and targets for sustainable consumption. EERF also considered the Annual Report of the Regional Rural Delivery Framework. Key points affecting us are the end of RSCP support for County Associations of Town and Parish Councils and RCCs and transfer of responsibility for town & parish councils to the Department for Communities and Local Government. It had been proposed that a small working group be set up to pull together responses. The Chair had also presented a paper on the future of EERF and this would be the main item for the December meeting.

Ann also reported on the 12 October meeting of the EERF sub group, Market Towns East, in Ramsey. The terms of reference, membership and future of the group had been discussed. Discussions had included how market towns can influence the Local Area Agreements, and on market towns' local governance including market town partnerships. Finally, funding had been obtained for research into inward investment for market towns, to be carried out by Sally Williams of Action for Market Towns.

7. Strengthening Communities (full presentation is on BRAF website)

Tracey James GO East set the context for the Strengthening Communities agenda, including that, nationally, 63% of citizens feel they have no influence over decisions affecting their local area. This was 72% in Bedfordshire. 72% of people in Bedfordshire are satisfied with the area as a place to live; 82% agree this is an area where people from different backgrounds get on well together. She set out some of the initiatives that had happened so far, such as Neighbourhood Renewal, Neighbourhood Policing and Local Area Agreements. The Local Government White Paper was aimed at giving local people and communities more influence, new duties for local authorities, and rebalancing relationships between central and local government and local people. It included proposals for more responsive services, with extended choice and better information, and empowered communities. From April 2009 there will be a new duty on local authorities to demonstrate how they inform, consult and involve citizens on services. A Community Empowerment Action Plan had been published in October. It was a joint action plan between Dept for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Association. Funding of £35m had been allocated to back up the action plan. She highlighted some actions of particular relevance to BRAF including community kitties,

response to petition and community calls for action, transfer of assets to communities,,investing in long term stability of the third sector, strategy for young people's empowerment in determining spending on youth services.

Ruth Kelly had commissioned the Quirk Review to look at obstacles to local authorities transferring assets to communities, and this was followed by a consultation on community assets by the Office of the Third Sector.

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There was discussion around whether people especially in small communities had time and will to manage community assets. Mark Smith described some of the work being done to support the voluntary sector in procurement and moving from grants to sustainability. It was noted that the announcement the previous day inviting unitary proposals for central and south Bedfordshire places emphasis on a strong citizen focus, the power of local people and engaging all sections of the community. Ann Lovesey said that despite meetings between the BATPC with the county and district councils to discuss charter.....the local authorities were not willing to..... Jon Boswell informed the group that bids for buildings at Moggerhanger Park and Bromham Mill had been submitted to the Big Lottery fund, out of 12 in the East of England.

8. IIC multi-use centres feasibility study

Jon Boswell explained that following the discussion on multi-use centres at the BRAF conference, a BRAF proposal for a feasibility study into their potential had been accepted into the IIC business plan. BRCC was lead organisation for the work. Whilst coming from a rural context, urban models were also to be included. [ask Jon for his note that he used].

Alex Francis pointed out [Sport England – sites for community gyms]

13. Any other business

14. Date of next meeting

Dates for 2008:

Friday 8 February

Tuesday 13 May

Wednesday 10 September

Thursday 20 November