

SHARING

THE CHALLENGE playing your part in reviewing the regional economic strategy

Name	Jane Markham	Address	The Barn, Buttercup Farm, Hockliffe Road, Tebworth, Leighton Buzzard, Beds LU7 9QA
Position	Coordinator	Telephone	01234 878149
Organisation	Bedfordshire Rural Affairs Forum	Email	janem@bedsrcc.org.uk

Q1: Do you agree with the purpose of the strategy?

Q2: Which of the PSA targets listed in appendix I do you see as being most important for the East of England (you may want to pick several of the targets)?

Q3: Should the vision set out in the existing regional economic strategy be altered?

The vision does not bring out the need for sustainability.

Q4: Have we identified the main defining characteristics in terms of how our region is actually performing against this vision?

Q5: Are the four pillars a useful way of grouping and understanding key dimensions of each goal?

Q6: Do you agree with the approach of addressing rural issues under each relevant goal, or should they be highlighted in a separate goal?

On balance, BRAF agrees with the approach of addressing rural issues under each relevant goal rather than as a separate chapter. Many issues are common to urban and rural areas, although the solutions may be different. However, this will only be effective if the strategy is effectively rural-proofed and the rural angles specifically and adequately explored and stated. For example, the provision of affordable housing in rural areas and the impact on rural areas of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Strategy need to be brought out on page 11. There should be something in the preamble to the effect that we want to ensure that all parts of the region and all its diverse components get a share of the action and the opportunity to contribute to the vision. There should be some opportunity to use rural examples and case studies of some of the other themes (such as R&D or innovation). Some of the strengths of the region lie in its rural heritage (world class food R&D for example, and some of the most entrepreneurial farmers in Europe). It would be unwise and very undesirable to pursue to its conclusion the line that rural is everywhere so doesn't need to be mentioned at all.

Q7: Overall, has the correct set of goals been identified? What do you think is missing?

Q8: What measures of performance should be associated with each goal, and can these be encapsulated in a small number of headline targets?

Q9: Are there any other priorities impeding regional development, which are not already highlighted in the FRESA, and how should these be tackled?

Q10: What are the other priorities for business development and support?

Q11: How can we create a better environment for enterprise and entrepreneurship?

Q12: How can we better use the success of centres of innovation and R&D throughout the region and develop commercial opportunities from them?

As mentioned above, we would want to see the strategy use specific rural examples e.g. food r&d

Q13: How should the opportunities afforded by the Sustainable Communities Plan best be utilised?

.The Strategy provides an important opportunity for economic development. However, the level

of housing development proposed will have a significant impact on rural Bedfordshire, which will come under pressure from three of the six growth areas i.e. Bedford/Kempston/Marston Vale, Luton-Dunstable-Houghton Regis, and Milton Keynes. The Strategy needs to specifically consider the impact of each element for rural communities, and the urban/rural interface. Unlike other areas e.g. Northamptonshire, the strategy does not cover rural areas and services in Bedfordshire which may mean opportunities are lost. There may be benefits for rural communities from housing growth (e.g. bigger school intakes may keep smaller local schools open, better bus services may be provided, better access to services) if development takes place in a sustainable way, but not if it takes place in an ad hoc piecemeal way with little long term thought being given to the "non growth" areas.

Q14: Where should our priorities lie in making the region an attractive place to live, work and visit?

There should be recognition of the economic and "quality of life" value of all of the countryside (not just AONBs for example). Sense of place, space and tranquility are highly important.

Q15: How far should work to tackle deprivation be focused on those areas and neighbourhoods falling within the ten per cent most deprived wards in the region (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000), and how can pockets of deprivation outside these locations, or in specific communities of interest, be addressed?

In the scenario planning stages of this consultation, all four of the scenarios showed potential problems in terms of declines in rural communities, rural services, increased polarisation between rural/urban or deprivation/affluence. BRAF strongly believes this underlines the necessity of continuing with specific financial intervention for rural communities. BRAF supports the recommendations the Countryside Agency put forward in its briefing paper "Tackling rural social exclusion in the East of England".

Q16: How can the whole region benefit from likely developments at Stansted, Haven Gateway ports and other international gateways, and how can any adverse consequences of these developments be mitigated?

Q17: What are the top road, rail and public transport priorities for the region, and how can they most quickly be delivered?

Q18: How can the region take advantage of the developments in ICT infrastructure and services; and what should be the relative roles of public and private sector investments over the coming period?

Q19: How can we best become an exemplar region in the use of environmental technologies?

Q20: How should the region get the most out of its complementary relationship with neighbouring regions?

Q21: How far should raising our regional profile focus on a single East of England brand, or build upon existing local and sub-regional identities? What other ways can the region ensure it exerts significant influence nationally or internationally?

Q22: Are there any 'big ideas' for the East of England that have been omitted from this document, or priorities that should have a greater prominence?

Q23: How can the speed and effectiveness of delivery be increased over the next ten years?

Q24: Which are the main organisations that should be involved in implementing the strategy, and what delivery models can we develop to achieve these goals?

Other comments

BRAF was unable to give detailed consideration to the consultation document given the short consultation period. However, I hope the above comments are helpful. BRAF looks forward to commenting more substantively on the main consultation.