

**West Kent Partnership
Notes of the Meeting 8 April 2005
Held at Hadlow Manor Hotel**

Present: Cllr David Aikman, Merle Bigden, Penny Chatfield, David Coleman, Cllr Alison Cook, Michael Cooke, Bill Fearon, Robin Hales, Roger House, Cllr Melvyn Howell, David Hughes, Jean Morgan, Brendan O'Connor, Declan O'Neill, Tom Phillips, Jeremy Price, Mark Raymond, Caroline Shaw, Philip Thomas, Barbara Thorndick, Cllr Grahame Weston, Cllr Mark Worrall, Mandy Wynne, Wendy Wood

Guests: Estelle Grant, Jan Bumstead, John Hopkinson, Stephen Rogers

Apologies: Steve Ford, Tony Fullwood, Janet Hughes, Alex King, Anne Knight, Alan McKendrick, Simon Wilshaw, Wendy Wilton

Chairman's opening remarks

Cllr Mark Worrall welcomed everyone to the meeting

1. Minutes/Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

- A warm welcome was extended to Rev Dr Michael Cooke, who joins the Partnership as the new Faith representative.
- Jean Morgan introduced the draft West Kent response to the South East plan consultation. SEERA have received 50,000 responses from across the South East and all responses have to be received by 15 April. There was a concern from Members of the partnership that West Kent views could be presented more strongly than the draft response and a number of suggested amendments were made to the draft. It was agreed that a revised draft would be prepared and circulated to partners for comments prior to its submission. [Revised draft as submitted attached with the amendments indicated in bold italics.]

JM

2. Project Funding

Safety in Action – Paper B

A fuller report will be circulated when received. The event was a success and the financial support of the West Kent Partnership much appreciated.

WKCVS Development Officer – Paper C

The organisation is now known as Voluntary Action West Kent.

The funding for this post has helped lever significant additional funding into the sector including:

- a training project with funding of £300,000
- partnership profile funding which helps identify models to use
- a commitment to develop a child and family centre in Sherwood
- an Institute of Fundraising scheme on self regulation and fundraising using codes of practice – one of only 2 CVS in the country to develop this
- a partnership with KCC for a £1.3M bid for ISB

It is unlikely that this level of success would have been achieved without the development officer post. Additionally, VAWK has been able to participate fully in the County Consortium looking at infrastructure issues for the voluntary sector and will lead on BME.

Some discussion followed on how hard it is to reach individuals from BME groups in West Kent as they tend to be fragmented. In Tunbridge Wells there are known to be a significant number of Filipinos working in the Health sector and it is understood that they can be reached through their Church attendance. The definition of BME has been widened to include faith groups, refugees and travellers.

Volunteering England – Rural Kiosk project

A full report will be brought to the July meeting after the project has been implemented. The first volunteer points are being rolled out next week to 9 sites and the second tranche of points will be rolling out during May and June. There is a launch on 21 April at Tonbridge Castle hosted by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council which will have BBC Radio Kent and the local press in attendance. The PR for the event is being handled by the media department of Volunteering England in London. Mandy Wynne thanked the Partnership for the funding which has enabled this opportunity to be taken up.

MWy

3. Conference – Paper D

Planning is progressing well. It is proposed that a draft Agenda will be sent out with invitations to delegates at the end of April. All speakers have now been secured with the exception of the transport session. All those involved in the Panel session or in charring sessions will be briefed in good time to allow them to prepare. Alison Cook suggested that the session she is down to chair should instead be chaired by Peter Fleming as she is standing down as Leader of SDC in May. It was reiterated that the conference is an excellent opportunity for the West Kent Partnership to showcase its work and future priorities. The voluntary sector representative in the Panel session will be Caroline Shaw. A delegate list will be circulated to partners to provide an opportunity to nominate additional delegates.

WW

4. Tunbridge Wells Community Plan – Paper E

Estelle Grant has been in post as community planner at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council since January. Estelle reported on the progress of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan after the first year which has seen 87% of actions delivered and 80% of targets reached. A summary sheet was

distributed which provides examples of some of the achievements which have been made.

The next stage will be to review the whole Community Plan which will require a full engagement process with partners and other stakeholders. A Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan Partnership is to be set up with forums picking up various themes from the Community Plan. It is envisaged that the West Kent Partnership conference will be useful as a method of engagement.

There will be reports on the Sevenoaks District and Tonbridge & Malling Community Plans at the next meeting.

MB/MR

Sevenoaks Community Plan partnership is engaged on joint work on key issues from the Sevenoaks area such as the future of the Paper Mill at Horton Kirby. The partnership has a very practical approach and picks up on issues highlighted in the LDF as well as community safety, social issues and other themes contained in the plan.

Tonbridge & Malling is at the end of the second year of the Community Plan and is embarking on a first review of the plan from June.

5. AIF Progression – Paper F

Members were asked to endorse a process for a review of the AIF with the objective of producing a current statement of investment sought for West Kent with a clear demonstration of need

The proposals outlined for this review process:

- link to the Regional Economic Strategy review timeframe to provide an opportunity to feed into and influence it
- identify an action plan for specific projects which are underway or can be initiated quickly for the financial year 2005/6
- recommend broadly retaining the existing strategic objectives and linking in new considerations, such as the incorporation of the Rural AIF and other issues which were not covered in the original AIF.
- Recommend a workshop for all stakeholders.

A temporary working group, comprising the chairs of regeneration, business development, skills and learning sub groups and some members of the business development sub group are to project manage the review process.

The updated AIF will focus on the delivery of existing actions which remain relevant and the development of new actions that address emerging key issues.

Whilst the review gets underway, as a non-priority AIF, we are continuing to liaise with SEEDA over funding this year for the ongoing work identified in the action plan.

It was commented that other sources of funding apart from SEEDA should be considered, for example, the European Social Fund.

Concern was expressed that the West Kent economy is at risk from expansion elsewhere in the South East and particularly from large investment in the adjacent growth area of Thames Gateway. There is a reliance on the small business sector in the West Kent economy and this is a sector for which it can be difficult to provide appropriate support.

It was pointed out that in a letter on 6 April, Paul Bevan reported that SEERA's select committee had doubled the amount of money available to sponsored AIFs for this financial year. There is now £17M available and even as a non-priority AIF we should be tapping into this resource. West Kent can demonstrate a sophisticated approach to partnership working which is a real strength. The West Kent AIF is innovative and different from other AIFs. In order to attract SEEDA funding it will be necessary for us to continue to develop innovative projects which do not compete with projects in priority AIF areas and to demonstrate our ability to implement projects efficiently. These points will be put to Anne Knight.

WW

6. Sub Group Updates

Regeneration – Paper G

The meeting endorsed the recommended membership of the Priority Communities Strategy Group and the way forward outlined in the Paper. Eamonn Dillon, Chief Executive of West Kent Extra is willing to chair this group and Jean Morgan and Wendy Wood will be meeting with him to brief him on the partnership's expectations and discuss the scope of the work to be undertaken. It may be necessary to apply to the partnership for funding which would be used to identify external funding for the support of specific projects. Subject to availability of members of the group it is envisaged that they will have met once before the WKP meeting in July.

7. Business Development – Paper H

Roger House reported that the Homeworker IT support report is nearing completion and generating several interesting possibilities for recommendations for implementation. This is an innovative piece of work and access to appropriate funding to implement the recommendations will be key to its success. There will be a full report to the meeting in July.

RH

It is hoped that the sites project can be progressed in this new financial year. In the meantime the implementation of the Heart of Kent Destination Management System has been funded by SEEDA. This system will add value to the tourism service and links to priorities identified in the West Kent AIF.

8. Learning and Skills

Bill Fearon provided a verbal report. The sub group met in March and will be providing a update to strategic objective one of the AIF. The group has been proactive and the review of strategic objective one will link to the framework identified by LSCKM which is focusing on three broad areas

- young people (improving participation and involvement)
- adults – raising skills levels
- improving quality and responsiveness of training and other provision

Vocational training opportunities at West Kent College with partner institutions are expanding and now include courses in Sport, Public Services and Logistics and Distribution. The Public Services training was welcomed. Currently this focuses on preparation for entry to the uniformed services but the course, which is a Btec is designed to support public service in general and if demand was proved could be expanded to cover, for example, training for local authority work, particularly now that the direct links between schools and local authorities are being eroded due to the pressure of following the national curriculum. The Government through the LSC see further education colleges as the link to employer engagement including training and assessment in the workplace. The West Kent Learning Federation is a good forum for this.

In September the Engineering and Motor courses will be situated at the North Farm site alongside construction and this will be developed as a centre of excellence in the region.

An outline planning application has been made for a £22M development at the Brook Street campus.

The StAR reviews are now drawing to a conclusion and the West Kent Learning Federation have an opportunity to support and take forward the actions for the young peoples' review. Specific action points highlighted include more vocational training for young people in Edenbridge and the delivery of vocational training on site at Tunbridge Wells High School and Wildernesse School.

Transport – Paper J

Following the letters sent to the Minister for Transport regarding the delays to improvements on the Colts Hill Strategic Link and the dualling of the A21, there has been a debate in the House of Commons led by MP for Tunbridge Wells, Archie Norman, on this issue and supporting letters sent to the Minister for Transport from Sir John Stanley, MP for Tonbridge and Malling. Tunbridge Wells is organising a petition regarding the A21 dualling and it was agreed that this should be presented as a West Kent wide petition.

TF

The demise of the Strategic Rail Authority has been delayed until after the election. It was commented that the issues surrounding this such as line capacity, infrastructure and investment in West Kent are also linked to the South East Plan. There is a real concern that the infrastructure in West Kent is under-resourced and inadequate to support future economic and housing growth. The

transport sub-group will focus on the infrastructure inadequacies and it was recommended that links be made with adjacent LSPs to establish joint areas of concern and make appropriate joint representations.

TF

Health

David Hughes has taken over as Chairman of the Health Policy Board and will be meeting with Declan O'Neill and Brendan O'Connor to re-establish the group.

Housing – Paper K

Barbara Thorndick reported that a successful launch of the two reports on essential worker housing was held despite the appalling weather and travel conditions. As the launch had been piggy-backed onto another event attendance was good and interest was solicited from people who may not have otherwise become involved. Both SEERA and GOSE were impressed by the support that West Kent is giving on essential worker housing issues. It is hoped that the Regional Housing Strategy will refer to the reports. Unfortunately a recorded radio interview was not aired due to an editorial decision to focus on the weather conditions. The housing sub group are talking with KCC as a large local employers to see if they might engage in employer investment in essential worker housing.

The importance was stressed of demonstrating to the local communities that research of this type is being done on their behalf as one means of addressing the lack of affordable housing in West Kent.

7. Presentation – West Kent Legal Services Partnership – Stephen Rogers

The powerpoint presentation given is attached. The partnership welcomed the work that the West Kent Legal Services Partnership carries out in our area. KCC Social Services expressed a wish to participate. There was some discussion regarding the level of work carried out in CAB's which centres on legal advice and the fact that much of the funding for the CABs is direct from local authorities. The Legal Services Commission do enter into contracts with CABs to provide funding for specialist services such as debt counselling.

8. Any Other Business

- The meeting formally noted that this will be the last to be attended by Grahame Weston as a County Councillor as he is not standing for re-election. The Chairman commented that his input and wisdom have been of great assistance to the partnership and thanked him for his involvement.
- It was noted by the Chairman that Cllr Alison Cook is retiring from the Leadership of Sevenoaks and thanks was given to her for her participation in these meetings and in SEERA and the Kent Partnership where she has tirelessly represented West Kent. Thanks also were recorded for her year as inaugural Chair of the West Kent Partnership.

- The Chairman will write to Rodney Stone wishing him well in his retirement.

MW

9. Next Meetings

- 21 June, 9.30am, West Kent Partnership Conference – East Malling Conference Centre
- 15 July, 10am, venue tba (please note date on Agenda incorrect)
- 21 October, 10am, venue tba

Revised Letter to:

Secretariat
South East of England Regional Assembly
Berkeley House
Cross Lanes
Guildford
GU1 1UN

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response to the Draft South East Plan

Please find attached a copy of a response to the above on behalf of the West Kent Local Strategic Partnership. ~~I welcome the opportunity to respond and the comments attached represent the views of the Partnership members and its Sub-Groups, which were agreed at a meeting on the 8th April.~~

With regard to the consultation as a whole, I am deeply concerned at the level of engagement and communication with the general public on what is a very significant document setting the scene for regional development for the next quarter of a century. SEERA have stuck rigidly to what remains an ambitious timetable for completing the first Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East of England and as a consequence good consultation has become a casualty.

The level of consultation has frankly been an insult to those who will be most affected by this plan and runs contrary to the Government's aspirations under the new Planning Act. The use of leaflets has been sporadic, the launch date was delayed by one week at short notice, the use of Local Authorities to run public meetings has led to confusion as to who to respond to and who is ultimately responsible. This can only be exacerbated by SEERA's recent proposals to change the process for the District level housing allocations exercise, which will leave the general public further bemused.

With regard to the document itself, the Partnership is particularly concerned that the South East Plan acknowledges and addresses the issues facing west Kent to enable Local Planning Authorities to develop detailed policies through their Local Development Frameworks, which together will deliver the aspirations of the three Community Plans and the **West Kent** Area Investment Framework.

I hope this is of assistance and look forward to being further engaged in the District level housing distribution exercise due to take place over the summer.

If you wish to discuss any matters arising from the detailed comments attached, please contact Ian Bailey (Head of Policy & Environment at Sevenoaks District Council) on 01732 227439 or ian.bailey@sevenoaks.gov.uk in the first instance.

Yours Faithfully,

Mark Worrall
Chairman West Kent Local Strategic Partnership

West Kent Local Strategic Partnership 8th April 2005

Response to the Draft South East Plan

Summary

On 21st January the WKLSP considered a report summarising the Draft South East Plan and the forthcoming consultation arrangements. The report also suggested a response to those policies and issues that are key to west Kent and invited further discussion and comments to be forwarded to the Head of Policy & Environment at Sevenoaks District Council for compiling a final response by the deadline of 15th April 2005.

Appended to this report is a final draft of a response for approval.

It should be noted that since the January meeting SEERA have decided not to hold a second round of public consultations on the District level housing allocations originally planned for the summer and instead have invited Local Authorities to carry out this work and submit their findings to SEERA in September.

It should be noted that this process is not finalised and was due to be considered further by SEERA's Executive Sub Committee on the 8th April. The Sub-Committee subsequently recommended that assuming Local Authorities carry out the public consultations on the District level housing figures, the deadline for submitting the data to SEERA will be 9th December.

1. Update since January

1.1 SEERA launched the draft South East Plan on 24th January for a 12 week public consultation period due to end at 5pm on 15th April. The consultation exercise included a series of public meetings in each Local Authority area, a leaflet drop to every household in the south east, a MORI poll and public notices, radio advertisements.

1.2 The coverage of the leaflet drop entitled "Your Shout" was intermittent, yet SEERA were reported to be fairly satisfied with the 20,000 responses received by the beginning of March. Attendance at the public meetings in Kent was consistent. The meeting in Sevenoaks held on 3rd March attracted in excess of 40 attendees.

1.3 The sub-groups of the WK LSP were provided with the opportunity to comment further on those parts of the plan that are relevant and the three

Council's making up the Partnership have also reported their responses to their Cabinets.

1.4 SEERA has advised that responses received after 5pm on the 15th April will not be considered further.

2. Next Stages

2.1 While the consultations have been taking place, Local Authorities have been progressing the next stage, namely the District breakdown of the housing growth to 2026. The tight deadlines imposed by SEERA for completing this work to enable the draft plan to be submitted to Government in the autumn had caused the Local Authorities some concern. SEERA were advised that it would not be possible to prepare the work and allow time for the relevant member approvals before forwarding the work to SEERA.

2.2 In response to these concerns SEERA's Regional Planning Committee on 23rd March agreed to a proposed amendment to the process of completing the draft South East Plan. ***This process is still being considered and SEERA's Executive Sub-Committee recommended on 8th April that assuming Local Authorities carry out the public consultations on the District level housing figures, that the revised date for submission to SEERA would be 9th December.*** ~~Local Authorities now have until September to complete the District level breakdowns and to consider how best to consult on these locally rather than SEERA collecting in the data and undertaking a second major public consultation over the summer. SEERA will consider the results in the autumn before submitting the revised draft South East Plan to the Government early in 2006.~~

2.3 While this proposal overcomes the immediate problem of meeting the ***April*** deadlines, Local Authorities ***would still be facing a challenging timetable, which is eased slightly by the extension to December. SEERA have offered a small contribution to Kent County Council and Medway Council to support the public consultation exercise, but there will remain a significant resource implication, while previously SEERA were intending to carry out this exercise.*** ~~will now be required to resource and undertake the whole process, including any consultation. It will also be confusing for the general public who have been advised that SEERA will be conducting a second major public consultation in the summer. It is likely that those consultations that do take place before the revised, September, deadline will be more targeted towards key stakeholders rather than a full public consultation.~~

2.4 The attached covering letter and comments represent a co-ordinated response incorporating comments made at the January meeting of the WKLSP, at sub-group meetings and through the individual Local Authorities.

3. Recommendation

That:

3.1 the update on the consultations on the draft South East Plan are noted; and

3.2 the attached letter and comments are agreed as a formal response from the WKLSP.

Ian Bailey
Head of Policy & Environment
Sevenoaks District Council

The West Kent Local Strategic Partnership Response to SEERA's Draft South East Plan "A Clear Vision for the South East" (April 2005)

General Comments

The West Kent Local Strategic Partnership (WKLSP) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft South East Plan. WKLSP supports the introductory sections of the draft plan insofar as they recognise some of the same challenges facing the Partnership when preparing the Area Investment Framework and the three Community Strategies for West Kent. However, the WKLSP acknowledges the caveats, regarding background data and the lack of public engagement as introduced by SEERA's Chairman at the Plenary session in December.

Specific Comments

Housing targets

Parts of the WKLSP area are included within two of the sub-regional areas that cover Kent and Surrey. The London Fringe/Central Arc includes part of Sevenoaks District around the built up area of Sevenoaks Town and areas to the west, while northern parts of Sevenoaks District and Tonbridge and Malling Borough are included in the Kent Thames Gateway "Zone of Influence". Tunbridge Wells Borough is not affected by the sub-regions and is wholly contained within the residual county area or "rest of Kent", as are the remaining parts of the other two local authorities making up the WKLSP.

The vast majority of the housing growth in both sub areas is earmarked for the Thames Gateway growth area (*i.e. **not the zone of influence***) and Surrey respectively. ~~This means, therefore, that the p~~ **Potentially, depending on the option chosen,** district level distribution of new housing in the three West Kent

LSP Local Authorities **could be lower than** ~~is likely to be very low, in fact far below existing rates of development, particularly if the sharper focus approach is eventually taken.~~

While the overall level of housing growth and broad distribution are generally acceptable, the WKLSP and the constituent authorities will wish to carefully consider the district level distribution when drafted later this year to ensure that the level of growth in West Kent has regard to existing commitments and is sufficient to meet local needs. The Housing Sub-Group of the WKLSP expressed the concern that the proposed housing growth for the “Rest of Kent” may be too low to meet local needs. For example, one of the options shows only 200 units per annum for the residual County of Kent.

Other Housing Policies

Policy H4 (Affordable Housing) The policy seeks the provision of 35-~~5~~ **40%** affordable housing over the region as a whole. Affordable and key worker housing issues are a priority in west Kent, were highlighted in the AIF and have been a focus of one of the sub-groups of the LSP. With a potentially low overall housing figure in west Kent, the percentages of affordable units (particularly social rented housing) needed to contribute towards meeting local needs may need to be higher than the regional average of ~~5~~ **40%**, raising questions over deliverability.

Policy H5 (Density) – This policy proposes an overall regional target of 40 dwellings per hectare (dph). This again raises questions of deliverability, as it is 10 dph over the Government’s suggested minimum density for the south east. It also raises questions as to how the policy will be monitored and managed by SEERA.

For example, many residential areas in west Kent are characterised by low density and/or are remote from access to public transport. If LDFs include policies that seek to balance the need to protect and enhance the character of these areas against the need for higher density schemes resulting in an average density below 40dph, how will SEERA compensate for this in other parts of the region to ensure the regional policy is achieved? There may also be phasing and implementation problems in bring forward larger brownfield sites across the region.

The Housing Sub-Group of the WKLSP also noted that higher densities may result in more taller, thinner housing, which may conflict with carbon indexing policies. SEERA may wish to consider resolving this potential conflict through the Sustainability appraisal of the Draft South East Plan.

The potential combination of lower housing targets, higher proportions of affordable housing and the need to balance density/character issues may make

the delivery of housing in west Kent difficult. The WKLSP and constituent authorities wish to bring these matters to SEERA's attention and seek reassurance that these local issues can be reflected in LDFs without jeopardising the requirement for these plans to be in general conformity with the South East Plan.

Gypsy/Traveller accommodation – A further amendment agreed at the SEERA plenary session in December 2004 was to include a policy in the draft plan for Gypsy/Traveller accommodation. This has become more urgent with publication of a draft revised Circular by the Government (Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation December 2004), which places new requirements on Regional Planning Bodies.

Sub-Regional Strategy Areas

While acknowledging the rationale behind the Thames Gateway zone of influence, which includes parts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Maidstone local authorities, the WKLSP and constituent authorities will wish to reinforce the statement included in the sub-regional strategy that the zone of influence should not be seen as a first resort in the event that the growth area reaches capacity. There may be related issues with the Ashford growth area to the east of the WKLSP. In such an eventuality the distribution of the shortfall should be considered at the regional rather than the sub regional level and considered fairly and fully in the light of the comments made under the Housing sections above.

Employment Land Policy

The WKLSP wishes to emphasise to SEERA that it is crucial that housing growth is accompanied (and phased) with employment growth to ensure sustainable development, yet the plan as currently worded is weighted towards meeting housing numbers. This should be redressed in the final version of the plan and linkages between housing, employment and infrastructure policies strengthened.

Due to high land values and Government pressure to deliver housing on previously developed land, employment sites in the West Kent area have been diminished over recent years, which exacerbates this concern. The Draft South East Plan focuses on growth areas and priority areas for regeneration for promoting new employment opportunities. The WKLSP would like to see more policies in the South East Plan relating to securing employment opportunities and supporting businesses outside these areas. In areas like West Kent, for example, more could be made of the potential contribution from the rural economy.

Environmental Constraints

The inclusion in the draft South East Plan of environmental policies that reflect national and international guidance is welcomed. However, given the importance of these policies, particularly in west Kent, the WKLSP considers that they should be given greater prominence in the final version of the plan.

Retail Policy

The draft South East Plan takes a different approach to the hierarchy of town centres than the current Kent and Medway Structure Plan. Bluewater Regional Shopping Centre is included alongside existing centres, while Sevenoaks Town Centre is absent. The WKLSP suggests that SEERA reflects the hierarchy in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan to ensure a more consistent approach.

Transport Policy

The Transport Sub-Group of the WKLSP stress the importance of ensuring adequate infrastructure provision through the implementation of the South east Plan for existing and proposed developments in west Kent. To illustrate this the Sub Group wrote to the Minister for Transport in February expressing concern over the continuing delay and uncertainty relating to the dualling of the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury. SEERA's support for such schemes through the South East Plan and the Regional Transport Strategy is welcomed.

The WKLSP consider that in general, the South East Plan should be infrastructure-led, in terms of identifying, implementing and phasing investment, particularly in the railway network and health care provision necessary to accommodate the projected levels of regional growth to 2026.