

Minutes of West Kent Partnership Meeting Thursday 1 November 2007

Minutes

Present:

Alan Mckendrick; Angela Painter; Anne-Marie Hannam; Bill Fearon; Charles Wilsher; Peter Fleming; Robin Hales; Roger House; Jon Rosser; Mandy Wynne; Margaret Howard; Mark Salisbury; Mark Raymond; Nicolas Heslop; Roy Bullock; Sheila Wheeler; Tom Phillips; Tony Bartlett; David Candlin; Peter York; Rob Cottrell; Mathew Balfour

Apologies:

Rosie Serpis; Wendy Wilton; Merle Bigden; Brendan O'Connor; Clair Fisher; Caroline Shaw; Paul Sayers; Nazeya Hussain; Nick Chard; Penny Chatfield; Michael Cooke; David Hughes

1. Minutes/matters arising

The Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

KCC free school transport pilot scheme

The pilots have been very successful with great co-operation from the bus providers who have increased capacity to run the scheme. The number of passes is currently at 4700 against an expected take-up of 3000.

27% of Freedom pass holders have switched from car to bus according to a questionnaire survey. KCC are in the process of measuring congestion in the pilot areas and should be able to release the results early next year.

2. Sub National Review of Economic Development and Panel Report on SE Plan – Paul Bevan, Chief Executive of SEERA

The meeting welcomed Paul Bevan who spoke about SEERA's responsibilities and issues for the future. Notes of this are attached at appendix 1.

3. AIF Annual Monitoring Report

Tony Bartlett reported that the AIF is progressing well against targets and aligns well with the LAA and government indicators. Full monitoring reports are available from Wendy Wood if required.

SO1 - Raise the profile of West Kent as a key area for investment

West Kent for Business website is in place and attention will be given to how to signpost businesses effectively to this resource. A meeting has been held between the economy sub group and Heart of Kent Partnership to identify joint working opportunities. The message on promoting West Kent to business is strong.

Action: Partners were asked to champion West Kent whenever they have the opportunity.

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SO2 – Maximise opportunities for individuals to enhance their skills

A range of apprenticeships are being developed including a young enterprise scheme for 14-16 year olds. Finding employers who will commit to an apprentice is a real issue as so many of our businesses are SMEs. A new Government Bill will make it a statutory requirement for LSCs to ensure employers provide apprenticeship places.

The new build of West Kent College continues. A professional development centre is being built in, not necessarily to provide qualifications but more to provide professional training, upskilling etc.

There is the prospect of a new website to be developed giving more information on further and higher education opportunities available in West Kent.

SO3 – Sustain and strengthen the local economy

The business community haven't highlighted to Businesslink any major issues other than problems around red tape and legislation. It is encouraging that issues relating to the location of premises are the lowest reported in all the county. The North Kent growth area, particularly in relation to financial services at Ebbsfleet is an issue to be aware of as some WK companies may re-locate. The Locate in Kent report presented to the last meeting on the supply and demand for business premises in WK is now with the three local authorities and will help and inform development control in dealing with development issues.

SO4 – Improve the quality of life for residents, particularly in the priority community areas

Tunbridge Wells – a community development co-ordinator is in place to support both priority neighbourhoods of Sherwood and Showfields. The TN2 Community Centre opened in June and provides ongoing support to the resident led trust. Its activities include debt management surgeries for local residents. Tunbridge Wells is one of only four Local Children's Trust Pathfinders. The agencies involved have produced a Children and Young People's Plan to be launched on 15 November. A youth worker is supporting the TN2 community trust in putting a Sure Start bid together

to fund after school club provision. A Stronger Healthier Communities Co-ordinator has been appointed. Figures for April-August 2007 show a 6.1% reduction in all crime. Nottingham Declaration has been signed.

Tonbridge & Malling – a new regeneration partnership is now formally established in Trench ward and a community development worker has been appointed. Children's Centres are being developed in East Malling and at St Stephens School and Longmead School, both in Tonbridge. A Youth Agreement has been adopted jointly with KCC and other partners with a range of projects undertaken. Health improvement projects across the three priority communities focusing on young people are being developed. An Action plan addressing priority actions has been agreed with the volunteer bureaux. An evaluation is underway of pilot PACTs in Borough Green, Wrotham and Platt as a model for local neighbourhood management. Draft Climate change strategy being prepared.

Sevenoaks – SDC continues to organise and service partnerships in Swanley and Edenbridge. Children's Centres locations to be confirmed. New 8-12 projects in place in Sevenoaks and New Ash Green following successful Swanley model. A District Play Strategy has been adopted and application for funding submitted to BIG. The Young Peoples Action Plan 100% on target. Healthy Swanley programme continues to deliver project and the Edenbridge health partnership project is ongoing. There has been an increase in volunteers who live in priority areas, registering compared with 2005/6. 94% of actions are on target in the Community Safety Plan and recorded crime fell by 8% in 206/7. Realignment of police boundaries has had a very positive impact on the district and brought benefits to Swanley in particular. Nottingham Declaration has been signed and multi-agency actions agreed and included in new Sevenoaks District Sustainable Community Action Plan (2007-2010).

Action: Partners should use opportunities to influence the LAA in terms of funding and prioritisation, particularly around policing issues.

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Action: The closure of post offices a major issues for many West Kent communities. Districts and other partners to send through responses to Wendy so she can formulate a joint WK response.

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SO5 – Expand the range of housing options available to local residents and workers

Sub group is taking forward a major project to identify older people's needs and preferences regarding sheltered and extra-care housing. Kent Supporting People Commissioning Body has agreed in principle to provide growth funding for 18 units for young people at risk in West Kent. Taking forward the recommendations of the Affordable Housing for Essential Workers report will be challenging. It is difficult to persuade even public sector employers that they should start to invest in employee

housing. There is an ongoing major issue surrounding the sale of public sector land at highest price.

Action: Margaret Howard to report back to meeting on recent disposal of KCC land in Sevenoaks District.

MH

SO6 – Increase the effectiveness of transport infrastructure in West Kent

Colts Hill Link remains an issue in relation to the Pembury Hospital development. Planning permission was granted 2 weeks ago with a comprehensive set of conditions around road improvement and public transport links between Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Maidstone. Lobbying at local level on Colts Hill Link will continue. Network Rail are now engaged with sub group and will attend the next meeting. SDC held a transport conference and the sub group will pick up on West Kent issues. Each of the three districts is looking at what can be introduced in terms of Quality Bus Partnerships. However, bus companies and districts are working well together and have no concerns even without a formal partnership in place.

Action: Transport sub group to report back to next meeting on how to continue to keep profile of Colts Hill Link high and whether an on-site meeting with the Transport Minister and stakeholders is to be organised.

**Transpt
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SO7 – Maximise opportunities for land based and other rural businesses

A number of items under SO7 in the AIF were aspirational. However, if West Kent is successful in securing Leader funding they will become a reality. SEEDA have signed off on funding for Business Link Kent to deliver workshops over the next 6 months to help farming communities to understand the opportunities available to them around diversification, sustainability, biofuels etc. This also links to the WKP conference in November.

Action: sub group reports to future meetings to be organised around a couple of key issues facing one or two of the subgroups so that over the course of the year all sub groups will have the opportunity to highlight a key area.

**All sub
G chair**

Action: Biofuels to be a topic for a future meeting

**Rural
Sub g**

4. WKP Future Focus

There was some discussion around the context in which the WKP operates.

Action: Recommendations to be adopted:

**Co-ord
Group**

- (a) WKP and its associated sub groups should continue to operate strategically with a specific emphasis on the implementation of the AIF and the need to address other common sub regional issues.
- (b) WKP funding should be retained at present levels but its distribution limited to AIF-related project work. The WKP Terms of Reference and Statement of Priorities should be amended on these lines.
- (c) District Level LSPs should be formed by April 2008 to take forward local community planning work and delivery of LAA at district level.

Additionally the following actions will give the partnership stronger lobbying muscle on strategic issues for WK.

Action: Key issues from each quarterly WKP meeting to be encapsulated so that partners can spread the lobbying message.

**Co-ord
group**

Action: Mechanism to be established for use within and outside of meetings to establish partnership's collective view on key strategic issues

**Co-ord
group**

Action: Mechanism to be established to identify current and urgent issues on which the WKP should be expressing an opinion both for meetings and between meetings – eg recent crisis in NHS Trust.

**Co-ord
group**

5. Co-ordinator's Report

Leader

The West Kent Expression of interest has been successful and we have now been invited to proceed to a full bid. SEEDA feedback was that the WK '...EOI fits very closely with the Leader programme.' Leader will bring in around £1.8M into rural WK over a 5 year programme and will be delivered via a local partnership through a bottom up approach. Leader provides for local management and the encouragement of innovation and experimentation.

As a large number of EOIs have been received this has had implications for the programme. SEEDA are applying to DEFRA for additional

funding from the Rural Development Programme for England to be moved into Leader. This means that emphasis has to be firmly on the farming, forestry and growing sectors as it reduces the funds available to these groups elsewhere

The WK Leader bid is in preparation for submission 18 January 2008 although a decision on the Leader bid will not be known until May 2008. SDC has been identified as the accountable body for the programme. A Local Area Group is being constituted which has to be at least 50% non public sector. The First LAG meeting will take place in the afternoon after the conference and the conference itself will be used to consult on key themes and bring forward project ideas.

Conference

There has been a change to one key note speaker – Lord Rooker, Minister for Sustainable Food and Farming and Animal Health and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords is speaking in place of Jonathan Shaw.

Promotion of the event is underway. Advertising has appeared in October issue of SE Farmer and will be repeated in November issue. Invitations have been being sent out over the last few weeks including via a BLK email mailing to database of landbased and rural businesses

The prospective Leader programme has already meant engagement with farming and forestry businesses and interest in conference is strong. The timing to link to the Leader consultation is ideal and the most will be made of this opportunity

Financial Report

£19,500 funding is available for the current financial year for AIF related project work and the projections for next year will generate available funding of £20,000 after overhead costs have been met

Project Funding

The reports from Small Business Ambassadors and Give and Gain were noted.

6. AOB

Response on Housing Green Paper – the meeting noted the response sent from the sub group. Jon Rosser commented that the Housing Corporation might well be in a position to fund any projects proposed for delivery this year and next year.

Speaker next meeting – Richard McCarthy, Director General Housing & Planning, Communities and Local Government has agreed to join us. His presentation is on "Delivering the Housing Green Paper".

Speaker future meeting - Adam Wilkinson, Managing Director, Environment and Regeneration, KCC to be invited to address a future WKP meeting. Adam's role is to provide strategic leadership for the Environment and Regeneration Directorate which manages a variety of work including land use and transport strategy, regeneration and sustainable communities, economic development, environment and waste and road maintenance

7. Dates of Next meetings - all at 10am

- 27 November, East Malling Conference Centre – conference
- Thursday 24 January 2008
- Thursday 24 April 2008
- Thursday 17 July, 2008
- Thursday 16 October, 2008

Appendix 1

West Kent Partnership Meeting – 1 November 2007 – Item 2

Sub National Review of Economic Development and Panel Report on SE Plan – Paul Bevan, Chief Executive of South East Regional Assembly

The South East Plan is a 20 year strategic plan for the South East linked to spatial issues. SEERA is also involved in the delivery of the SE Plan and has Boards for Transport and for Housing who advise ministers on the allocation of regional budgets. SEERA has a scrutiny role in relation to the RDA – SEEDA and hold SEEDA to democratic account.

South East Plan

Preparations for the Plan began in 2003 with extensive consultation in the public domain – every household in the region was leafleted and the whole consultation process generated some 95,000 responses. The plan was developed from this and submitted to Government who appointed an independent Panel of Inspectors to report on the Plan.

The focus in the South East is growth with population growth over the period predicted to rise from 8 million to 9 million people. This has implications for where people will live and work. The SE Plan proposed 29,000 new homes a year. Delivery is currently 32-33,000 homes and the Panel have recommended that 32,000 homes pa should be the target. This has resulted in each of the 3 WK districts having an additional 10% allocation to meet. The Secretary of State, Hazel Blears, still has to give her response and it is possible that she may raise the target level. Housing numbers in the SE is a highly political and contentious issue.

Infrastructure – Housing and Transport Boards

The Housing and Transport Boards help to prioritise public funds expenditure to deliver the Plan and inform local planners and LDFs which have to conform to the Plan.

Communities and Local Government have set targets and a budget for the delivery of affordable housing which are unrealistic in the South East and to which the Housing Board are responding. Other regions have had increases in budget of around 20%

Funding for housing will follow growth projections although the reality is there will never be enough money to do everything wanted. Incentive schemes can be problematic if the implementation isn't thought through properly. WK growth is modest compared to other areas which are growing at a higher percentage rate. A tariff approach can be helpful and is working effectively where trialled – eg Milton Keynes and Ashford. Areas such as WK with strong land values are in a strong position as land values won't seize up. Section

106's will sometimes depress land values as well and the tariff approach can offer property developers certainty on additional costs exposure.

New Towns are a reasonable approach to sustainable communities and were posed as an option in the consultation on the SE Plan to meet housing numbers but received very little support from the public and stakeholders who preferred to keep the green belt.

The Transport Board has a role in programming improvements relating to the regional highway network and major local schemes.

A strategic approach to managing resources for transport infrastructure is essential but in conjunction with investment in infrastructure other approaches need to be considered such as managing traffic flows on motorways, particularly the M25. WK has benefited from investment in the A21 but this is actually more in respect of opening up the south coast and regeneration issues around that than for the direct benefit of West Kent. The democratic process around the decisions on priorities for infrastructure is very important.

Sub National Review of Economic Development

This has been undertaken by the Treasury under the guise of the comprehensive spending review. It has been driven largely by concerns in the north that the narrowing of the economic gap between North and South was not happening. A lot of the recommendations in the Review are geared towards the North where there are significant numbers of cities with unitary authorities and a capacity to deliver on an economic agenda. In the South East we have far fewer unitary authorities and a predominantly two tier structure which is more complex to address. Some of the recommendations don't really apply to the South East. Government will now consult on certain aspects of the Review later this year and SEERA are taking the opportunity to influence the consultation. There is an opportunity now to respond strongly that the Review needs to take into account the South East but the South East needs to be clear on what it wants.

Under the new system, RDA's will be compelled to devolve economic development delivery to LAs where there is capacity – ie at county council and unitary level. In the northern big cities this makes sense but in the SE with a far greater number of two tier authority areas, there is a question over where that leaves district involvement.

The issue of an increase in business rates being paid direct to County where place making is at a local level should be lobbied on in the SE where there are far more two tier structures. This is an example of where the sub national review has a focus on unitaries in the North.

A major recommendation in the review is a move away from the current structure in the South East of SEERA as a regional, democratic body with responsibility for the regions spatial strategy, and SEEDA as the RDA responsible for the regions economic development strategy, to a single body

responsible for it all and with a single strategy. This body will be SEEDA. This has implications for implementation of LDSs and for democratic representation at a regional level in the SE.

The Regional Assembly will cease to exist after 2010 when legislation is passed. A Regional Minister has now been appointed – Jonathan Shaw, who can represent government's views to the SE and the SE views to Government. There is also a proposal for a Select Committee for each region.

SEERA are making the most of opportunities to influence the consultation on the Review and to get an alternative SE model agreed in broad terms. They are also lobbying for SEEDA to become effectively a shared agency between central and local government taking forward the strengths of both current agencies. If that can't be achieved then SEERA will focus on obtaining a commitment to a dual key for signing off which will involve having a collective local government body to represent LA interests. A political tendency away from regionalism is a potential danger as not pulling together at a regional level could result in lack of democratic input to SEEDA.

Any future arrangements for democratic representation on the new body must be inclusive of all 74 LAs and the proposition is to have a council of all leaders that will come together but the 74 will have to nominate just a few to negotiate and take the work forward. By choosing not to be involved in that process because of non-commitment to regionalism there is a risk that views won't be properly represented.

Planning expertise currently available in the Assembly could be continued by the LA planners at the Assembly being retained intact as a strategic unit within the new organisation to work closely with Government and SEEDA. This will be an important issue to push if SEEDA won't move forward on the joint agency idea.

A shared agency or independent planning unit is the way to ensure that the work put into the SE Plan isn't lost. Government has made it clear that it will consult but there are definitely areas that haven't been thought through properly. A single strategy, with the RDA as the key agency is the most likely route forwards but SEERA say that any new agency must be shared and carry forward the positive attributes of both SEEDA and SEERA and a strong local government voice will be needed to keep pushing on this issue. Representations need to start this month so that they can be included in the consultation process which will run from 12 weeks from December.