

**South East Rural Affairs Forum (SERAF)  
Meeting Minutes – 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007  
Stanmer House, Falmer, Brighton**

<b>Present:</b>		<b>Jeremy Leggett : Chair</b>	<b>Paul Holmes-Ling</b>
		<b>Edward Stenhouse</b>	<b>Shaun Leavey</b>
		<b>Chris Chaney</b>	<b>John Lytton</b>
		<b>Glyn Evans</b>	<b>Anne-Marie Nash</b>
		<b>John Evans</b>	<b>John Padfield</b>
		<b>Patrick Feehily</b>	<b>Richard Rand</b>
		<b>Moya Hayden</b>	<b>Jenny Usher</b>
		<b>Kevin Hazell</b>	
<b>Guests:</b>		<b>Norman Boyland</b>	<b>Sussex and all SE LSC</b>
<b>SERP</b>		<b>Gill Cameron-Waller</b>	<b>District Councils.</b>
		<b>David Carey</b>	<b>Hadlow College</b>
<b>SERP</b>		<b>Chris Edward,</b>	<b>Natural England</b>
		<b>John Godden</b>	<b>Lantra</b>
		<b>Pam Lumsden</b>	<b>NIACE</b>
		<b>Julie Price</b>	<b>GOSE</b>
		<b>Peter Simpson</b>	<b>SEEDA</b>
<b>Secretariat:</b>		<b>Stuart Lloyd</b>	<b>GOSE</b>
		<b>Jim Ward</b>	<b>GOSE</b>
		<b>Hannah Bussey</b>	<b>GOSE</b>

**Apologies:** Cherry Aston, Hugh Broom, Edward Dawson, Steve Gilbert, , Moya Hayden, John Holbrow, David Knowles, John Padfield, Joanna Richards, John Tucker, Stephen Trotter, William White, Jenny Williams, Ian Wolverson

Delegate information and background literature were available on registration

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming those invited as guests and those substituting for regular members. A round table of introductions took place.

Previous Minutes: No amendments were requested to the last circulated minutes.

Actions arising from previous minutes:

Action 1: Valerie Carter: (message forwarded)

The SEEDA Rural Access to Services Programme [RASP} will start with a gathering of an evidence base this autumn. The programme has now been fully approved by the SEEDA Board with the programme proper intended to start in January 2008. Delivery partnerships still have to be agreed.

Jeremy pointed out that rural partnerships seem to be missing from SEEDA's Sub-Regional Partnership Review. and asked whether rural partnerships are going to be picked up?

Peter Simpson responded that rural partners were being taken into account and that SEEDA expects to work more closely with local authorities, including through the annual review of Local Area Agreements, to achieve greater alignment between regional and local activity and resources.

SEEDA is waiting for the outcome of the sub-regional review of partnerships before making decisions about delivery partnerships for the RASP programme –However SEEDA is willing to give a small contribution to sub-regions to enable them to produce baseline information to use as an evidence base and justification for the projects that will be delivered under the new programme.

**ACTION:** Peter to circulate dates of meetings that he is setting up in his Surrey and Sussex role so that rural members can attend. NB: It should be noted that the Surrey meeting has already taken place and invitations have already gone out for Sussex on 29<sup>th</sup> June.

#### Action 2: Press release

Jeremy reported that the intended press release had not been carried through to its intended conclusion. He suggested as an alternative that the SERAF Annual Report carry a heading on the Delivery of the Health Service.

Chairman's report: (Complete copy included in the delegate pack.)

- SERAF meeting with Minister focused on health service. Stressed the concern that rural areas access to health services have not been taken fully into account in impending Fit for the Future re-organisations. Also concern about GP out of hours service and NHS Direct.
- Next iteration of the Regional Rural Development Framework to be finalised over the next couple of weeks as well as completing the monitoring report for 2006/7
- Total budget for RDPE will be around £9m per year across the region. LEADER expected to be around £3.25m

- Research has provided an evidence base for identifying areas where the local population had poor access to 'accessible greenspace' so that resources could be targeted in improving this.

Edward stated that if this research were a base for Natural England to take on compulsory purchase powers for public use it would be an unacceptable way forward.

Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming Update The Board is continuing to work through the five themes set out in the '*Forward Look*' document. There is a meeting booked in July to look at climate change mitigation as both agricultural and horticultural sectors are expected to have a neutral footprint.

The Ardingly Show on 12<sup>th</sup> July has received funding from the Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming budget. The Year of Food and Farming is progressing across the country. SEEDA have been very generous in the South East region.

#### Rural: Skills:

David Carey opened the discussion and commented on the difficulty involved in the transfer of complicated scientific knowledge in a readily acceptable format to the general public. He also mentioned that Hadlow College is now part of the Chicago Climate Exchange. <http://www.chicagoclimateexchange.com/> Peter Simpson also pointed out the existence of the Food Climate Research Network run by Tara Garnett (Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey, 020 7686 2687 [www.fcrn.org.uk](http://www.fcrn.org.uk) <<http://www.fcrn.org.uk/>)

John Godden provided a handout for Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based sector.

Lantra leads on 17 land-based industries. It involves a million paid workers, 500,000 volunteers, 230,000 businesses, (90% of which are micro businesses) and works to try to cover employers as well as the self-employed.

Lantra's aim is to promote learning and business development as the land-based engineering industry now has more (and more need for) advanced technology than the car building or similar industries. To be able to deliver this agenda to its full potential there is a need to influence government for the benefit of those industries and the influencing aspect needs the help of groups like SERAF.

Lantra also leads on National Occupation Standards – and uses them to identify qualifications needed to take forward the needs of land-based industries so that it can set up the appropriate training courses required. The industry only wants what is relevant but there are hundreds of qualifications available and so a real need to thin them down.

This reflects that there are big challenges facing the land-based and rural economy sectors. Specialist colleges have a part to play but they also have to change to keep up. Colleges necessarily provide different products – as there is a diversity of skills across the industry ranging from florists all the way through to engineering. Chiefly there is a need for work-based learning in bite sized chunks, however, this has led to some colleges cutting hours and cutting practical time - which allows government to fund down to the lowest common denominator. This is something that needs to be addressed by Landex – the association of land based colleges. <http://www.landex.org.uk/>

In the past someone working on the land was unlikely to have a degree or even a foundation degree at university, however, the land-based sector is now breaking up with people retreating into specialization. This will mean workers having to rise from NVQ Level 1 to level 4-5 standards and will probably bring the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/> into play to support building lifelong learning.

Pam Lumsden described the Learning and Skills Council's Action for Communities strategy which aims to maximize opportunities for adults in the South East to learn in their communities. NIACE is currently leading a European funded project, with 15 partners, which is establishing 13 learning networks across the region. These networks are intended to lay the foundations to bring people together to learn in the most productive and effective atmosphere.

John Lytton pointed out that it is all very well equipping the people with the skills but rural housing is so expensive that they cannot afford to live in rural areas and that this is a serious imbalance in the system.

Jeremy added that there was resistance to affordable housing from local people as many see 'cheap housing' as being provided for less desirable residents. They often get their way because only the villagers that don't want affordable housing turn up at the planning meetings – a greater cross-section should be persuaded to attend.

Others countered that as the cost of living goes up house prices will stabilize and pointed out that with training, wages are rising anyway with a tree surgeon averaging £20-30k and a tractor combination driver averaging £30k.

It is expected that there will be a big development in sustainable farming but not likely to be too much funding around to finance it. Environmental issues seem potentially attractive (particularly with a technological element) and it was noted that within next 10 years viability of arable farming will require specialist skills (eg the use of satellite technology)

It was stated that those involved in training are buoyant and see many rural opportunities on the horizon. Others, however, are more despondent as they can't see growing numbers of academic successes fitting into structural element of countryside (eg schools, housing) without major change.

Pam noted that children leaving school early did so because they were disenchanted and therefore would have no interest in returning to learning. There is a need for a really persuasive sales campaign. David Carey agreed that there were many 16-21 years old lacking in numeracy skills. But felt that the prospect of full diplomas would help them develop their skills through hands on experience. It was also pointed out that Identifying the skills that people do have is essential – some may be personally no good at the old-fashioned 3Rs but are computer literate so they bypass a lot of the problems.

Jenny stated that the Year of food and Farming is a great idea to interest young people in working towards rural qualifications but felt that it might be a little late as there will inevitably be a skills gap before any enthused children can take up the slack. It was also mentioned that while working between colleges is becoming very effective and energetic, planning 10 years ahead was very difficult with funding so uncertain.

There are a large number of one person businesses which will end when they retire. Family businesses are being brought out and/or good supervisors are being poached. There is a definite need to promote learning and investment in people. Fresh Start is a project matching new people entering the industry with retiring farmers. Edward noted that there were once 400,000 businesses in the rural south east but that there are only 230,000 of them left, a lot being one man businesses. Shaun pointed out that it might be better for retirement age people to step down to allow opportunities for young people (while the old expertise could still be called upon if necessary).

Horticulture used to be big in the UK but now a lot of what is sold is coming in from abroad for lack of local nurseries. Pot plants from Holland for example. However, bringing in foreign plants also provides a route to import foreign insect parasites.

When looking at rural skills there is also the question of migrant workers and the range of skills that they bring with them. There will always be a need for manual skills recent studies show that the fruit picking industry and a good percentage of the dairy industry would collapse without them. There are challenges on reading and writing with migrants, which have been the subject of lots of research for the Sector Skills Council. Some have been trained, particularly for communication skills, but as soon as there training is completed they often move away from rural industry into better paid jobs elsewhere.

John Evans pointed out the dearth of butchers, stating that farmers need these skills for setting up their own farm shops. Edward commented that the Health and Safety requirements are too expensive for small enterprises while major supermarkets (who also demand Health and Safety measures from suppliers) can easily afford it allowing them the opportunity to move in and buy out the smaller players.

Norman summarized the discussion pointing out that, if possible, we should be directing the aspirations of young people – there is certainly a way forward to building a career in the rural sector but equally a need to sell the idea. There are few family connections in

rural areas anymore (eg dad used to be a tractor driver) so the opportunities must stand alone.

The south east region has more difficulty than other regions because we have so many small employers who are up and doing themselves. They require someone equipped with skills but have no time to train anyone in the way that larger companies have. The Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) have identified that there are 20% of the 16-25 age group in the South East region who are either illiterate or innumerate and will fund provision to enable anyone to achieve their basic skills or first level 2 qualification.

Where there are small numbers on courses, trainees may have to travel a long way to their specialist colleges which is tedious and often not affordable. Training provision needs to be joined up and the government should be looking for opportunities to do this. However, the LSC do have some funds to provide boarding at the agricultural colleges for blocks of 6 weeks to provide hands on learning skills.

It was pointed out that many skills are taught in general Further Education colleges as well as in agricultural colleges. However, John Godden argued that we cannot just think of numbers – in terms of popularity few trainees want to study horticulture or land-based engineering while lots want animal care and/or equine studies when there are not enough jobs to accommodate them.

The final point in the morning's discussion was that young people now have far better communications and risk taking skills on leaving school than previous generations, so perhaps more structured efforts should be put into persuading them to become entrepreneurs.

**Action:** Members of the Task and Finish Group taking forward actions from the morning's meeting are: Jenny Williams, John Evans, David Carey (Hadlow College) and Julie Nicholas (Sussex LSC).

LUNCH

### Feedback On Morning Session

Richard stated that the different format (the move away from presentations to direct discussion) provided a good focus allowing the key people to be more participatory rather than just presenting. This could make others more willing to volunteer to speak to the Forum.

There had been the opportunity for an element of constructive conflict through response, question and clarifications and the timing allowed further discussion with the speakers over a sandwich at lunch. There had also been the opportunity

to discuss issues from both a narrow and wider context which was of benefit because sometimes, with expert presenters, their fields of interest are narrowly focused and they sometimes feel uneasy about treading on somebody else's territory so missing the strategic point and where it all fits into the big picture.

Perhaps there is a need for somebody famous to present and promote the case for rural skills. This would need to be done in an honest but positive manner.

### Conference Feedback

Shaun stated that it was good that the speakers were responsive to questions but that they should have been given clearer instructions to keep to time.

More should be made of the connection between the county rural fora and SERAF. SERAF could provide the topics for the county fora to debate, and they could then feedback to the next quarterly meeting.

The promotion of the conference lacked balance. It was initially stated that there were only limited delegate places but, nearer the day it appeared to be that we were desperately seeking delegates. For future events planning should begin earlier.

Stuart reported that the afternoon feedback sheet had brought out some issues but would not generate the advisory document expected. Shaun agreed that the afternoon did not show the Forum at its best, the quality of debate was not very good, the attitude generally being "if the government wants us to do anything they should give us more money".

Jenny proposed that the summary of the afternoon session should be placed on the website as opposed to publishing a hardcopy document. Links on the website could lead to other advisory sites.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to check whether the expected Local Authority Climate Change document and/or the parish council Climate Change document have been published.

### Forum previous progress and future prospects

Jeremy introduced this section of the agenda by highlighting that one of the main difficulties for the Forum is making things happen on the ground. Jeremy also welcomed Chris Edwards of Natural England and Gill Cameron-Waller representing District Councils to this session. It is felt that the Forum is making little impact across the region or in Whitehall with regard to the rural agenda. Discussion then followed around how best to achieve a greater profile and relevance for the Forum.

It was agreed that the task and finish group approach which was suggested at the previous meeting in Godalming in February should be the way forward. Also that the

PR profile of SERAF should be enhanced by making use of a properly managed press release campaign.

Richard pointed out that there is also a representation issue with membership numbers falling since the start of the Forum. It was noted that not all of the more regular attendees were at this meeting anyway. It was also suggested that SERAF might become involved with other groups such as County Rural Forums and other stakeholder organisations which may be helpful in influencing policy outside of the Defra agenda, i.e Health and that these organisations could provide members to the Forum. Regular quarterly meetings with the Minister is a strong selling point to other organisations who may not have this access.

Chris Chaney noted that there were deliverables and outcomes within the original terms of reference and asked whether these could be used as a baseline for the Forum's overall output.

Stuart gave some examples of work over the past 18 months which included involvement in the development of the South East plan and the invitation to take part in the Examination in Public, the report back to the Affordable Housing Commission, and contributions to the development of the Regional Implementation Plan for the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

Jeremy suggested that an annual report would help to highlight recent achievements.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to take forward the drafting of an annual report in conjunction with the chair.

Gill stated that SERAF must be able to link successfully with other policies which have an impact on the rural agenda for example; Sustainable Community Strategies are adopted by Local Authorities but produced by Local Sustainable Community Groups. SERAF people need to sit on the local groups producing these things to get rural issues included.

Julie reported that the link between SERAF and the South East Rural Partnership (SERP) remained strong and that SERP had also reached a point where it too felt a 'stock-take' would prove useful.

**ACTION:** It was agreed that a task and finish group be set up following the next meeting of SERP to discuss a review of the Forum and present findings and proposals for the meeting in September.

**Next Meeting 18th September 2007 Venue to be confirmed**