

**South West Regional RDPE Implementation Group Meeting
24 July 2008 – SWRDA Offices, Sterling House, Exeter
Minutes of Meeting**

Present:

Andrew Slade – Chair, SWRDA/GOSW
Paul Shand – GOSW
Gerry Hamersley – Natural England
Ian Piper – SWRDA
Bruce Douglas – SWRDA
Kevin Ward – Environment Agency
Phil McVey – SWRDA
Mark Durk – Forestry Commission
Peter Hardaker – Cornwall Agricultural Council
Lucy Macaulay – Secretariat, Natural England

Apologies were received from Tim De-Winton, Matthew Woodcock and Tim Wheatley

Welcome

Approval of minutes from 22 April 2008.

1. Minutes of the 22 April 2008 meeting were approved subject to one amendment.

Delivery Partner Updates

Natural England Update

2. Gerry Hamersley reported joint working between delivery partners was starting to take shape. There had been good progress on clarifying the role of SWREG among NE staff, but there was still room to develop signposting arrangements so customers would receive a fully integrated service.

3. Gerry advised the Group that there was not a shortage of funding available for Entry Level Stewardship; despite rumours to the contrary the position was quite the opposite. The main issue for NE was whether there was capacity to generate and process applications.

4. Gerry presented a paper and map on phase 2 targeting for Higher Level Stewardship. Gerry said that establishing priorities and mapping Core Target Areas was near completion. He said that when complete the map would be used pro-actively to generate HLS agreements. The Group asked for their thanks to be passed onto Phil Tolerton for leading the work and suggested a further stock-take with him at the next RIG meeting.

Action: Phil Tolerton to be invited to the next RIG meeting

5. Gerry Hamersley advised the Group that approximately six weeks ago responsibility for Energy Crop Scheme mapping was passed over from Defra

to NE. Gerry said that it was still early days and that the majority of the work would take place throughout the rest of the year.

6. Gerry informed the Group that to date no applications to the Energy Crops Scheme had been received for the SW region in 2008 - 09. Peter Hardaker said that the debate around agriculture and landuse had changed dramatically over the last 6 months. He questioned whether the Group should open up the debate around support for energy crops under RDPE and the possibility of retargeting funding.

Action: Paul Shand to raise with Defra colleagues the medium to longer-term policy position on energy crops. Gerry Hamersley to raise with Natural England colleagues nationally

7. Gerry presented an update paper on the Isles of Scilly/Landscape Management Project. Gerry said that Natural England's aim was to finalise the project in July and submit to Defra in the autumn. Peter Hardaker asked the Group for advice on the latest position with the Isles of Scilly Abattoir project. Gerry added that he was concerned that there were a number of proposals for the area that were being developed in isolation.

Action: Simon Trehane to discuss proposals in relation to RDPE for the Isles of Scilly with Tony Steele (GOSW) to ensure better alignment and integration.

8. Gerry reported that a new upland strand of ELS had been announced by Hilary Benn. This new strand would replace HFA in 2010. Further discussions would be held over the summer.

9. Andrew Slade reported that the Upland Conference was well attended, with over half the audience made up of farmers from the SW Uplands. The Group reported that the announcement of an RDA Axis 1 project focused on the Uplands went down well, as did Janette Ward's presentation about Axis 2 support. Ian Piper acknowledged that a focus on the Uplands had helped to illustrate what the Programme could offer for a particular place and that the Group should look to replicate this approach. Andrew Slade added that Nigel Stone (Exmoor NPA) had provided important leadership for the Uplands project.

Forestry Commission Update – Mark Durk

10. Mark Durk presented the Commission's update paper. He added the English Woodland Grant Scheme opened for applications on 30th May. It had not been possible to confirm regional budgets for 2009/10 as FC was unlikely to receive a budget settlement until later in the summer. However the Commission was planning to a conservative estimate based on the 2008/09 budget.

11. For 2008/09, Mark said take-up had been relatively slow - with the exception of Woodland Improvement Grants for Biodiversity. He added that the Programme would be overcommitted and there would be an increased

emphasis on publicity in order to reach the annual target. He also said that for this year there was an additional 2 points on the scoring form for woodland creation.

South West Regional Development Agency Axis 1 and Axis 3 update

12. Ian Piper circulated an update table of commissioned activity. He reported that there had been over 300 enquiries to the SW Rural Enterprise Gateway. Across the region 57 applications for additional funding had been received. In Cornwall 22 firm proposals for projects had been put forward and of these it was expected that 12 would receive final approval. Ian said that although this marked significant progress since the start of the Programme the pace would need to be stepped up. Ian added that more effort was needed to make the Gateway more accessible through advertising, awareness raising and explaining clearly what funding could be used for.

13. Ian reported there was a support team (based on the Cornwall model) in place in each sub-region to help facilitate activity under Axis 1. Ian was grateful to David Rodda and his team for helping to develop this project.

14. Ian mentioned that a number of bids had been received and were being short-listed to run the grant administration body for Axis 1 and 3. He said there had been a strong response from a wide variety of organisations.

15. Ian reported that the ability to do more and push forward project activity more quickly was a question of capacity. He said that the absence of Technical Assistance meant that getting projects developed (including detailed consultation with external partners) budgets spent and projects' delivering under the new Commissioning process was taking longer than hoped. Ian mentioned that this point had been relayed to Mike Anderson when he visited SWRDA earlier in the month.

16. Phil McVey noted that under the Convergence and Competitiveness Programmes Technical Assistance Funding was being used for partnership working, development work, publicity and evaluation and that based on the experience of previous European Programmes Technical Assistance had been crucial in maximising the benefits from investments.

17. Paul Shand said that he had asked Defra about the availability of funding (including Technical Assistance) particularly to help with joint communications and strategic alignment of the Programme at a regional level. He was told that no additional funding would be available to regions for such activities over and above those already allocated to each delivery partner under Axis 1, 2 and 3.

18. Peter Hardaker said there was a real risk to the performance of the Programme if delivery did not pick up pace and greater effort was made to promote and communicate (in the round) the opportunities available to land based businesses and rural communities. He asked whether any uncommitted Objective 1 and 2 funding could be used to aid the delivery of RDPE.

Action: Phil McVey to explore options for using EAGGF/Objective 1 funding to support the delivery of RDPE

19. Andrew Slade noted there was a strong case for dedicated funding for joint communications and facilitation especially given the reported underspend under Axis 2 and the issues with getting Axis 1 and 3 funding out the door quickly. He said that he would like to know whether a lack of Technical Assistance was an issue for other regions

Action: Paul Shand to discuss with the GO Network and Ian Piper to raise with the other RDAs.

20. Paul Shand noted that Peter Unwin's visit to the region on 2nd and 3rd October presented an opportunity to raise the issue of Technical Assistance with Defra's senior management.

South West RDA Axis 4 Local Action Update

21. Bruce Douglas advised the group that twenty bids had been received requesting over £60 million of RDPE funding. He said that the assessment and selection process was well underway, with the final meeting of the Selection Panel taking place on 25th July. He noted that Natural England and the Forestry Commission had played an active and vital part in the assessment process and in helping to select local action groups.

22. Bruce mentioned that the total value of bids from the Convergence area had exceeded the initial indicative allocation for local action in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Bruce said the Cornwall RDPE Group had been consulted on moving funding from other measures to support potentially successful bids. Ian Piper added that the Selection Panel was looking to scale down a number of the bids and that the RDA would also look at the options for delivering some activity through other parts of the Programme.

Action: Bruce Douglas to notify the RIG of the Selection Panel's decision as soon as possible. Ian Piper to contact Peter Hardaker about the Selection Panel's decision in relation to the Convergence area

23. Gerry Hamersley said that he had been impressed by the way the Local Action selection process had been managed and was encouraged by the environment content within the bids and the links that had been made to axis 2. Andrew Slade on behalf of the RIG thanked Bruce and everyone involved in the selection process for all their hard work.

24. Gerry Hamersley asked what the arrangements were for monitoring Local Action. The Group agreed that it was not necessary to put in place a separate programme monitoring committee and that the RIG would continue to oversee Axis 4 in the same way it does the other axes.

Environment Agency Update

25. Kevin Ward presented a paper to the Group: Defining Environmental

Outcomes for the South West Agricultural Resource Management (SWARM) Programme.

3. Review of live action points as at 21 July 2008

26. The action points document was reviewed and updated.

Action: Lucy Macaulay to update action points document and circulate to RIG

4. Strategic issues – Overview of progress

27. In a review item, the Group whether it had considered the key thematic priorities for the Programme to date. Kevin Ward suggested further attention could be given to Anaerobic Digestion and potential support under the Programme. Ian Piper added that a Group chaired by the RDA was looking at the potential for Anaerobic Digestion in the region and would pick up the opportunities afforded by the new Programme.

28. Phil McVey mentioned the Convergence Programme was investing in an environmental research institute based in Cornwall. The Group agreed that there were potential links to be made to RDPE, both in terms of supporting the institute's work and learning from best practice.

Action: Phil McVey to circulate the feasibility scoping study report for further discussion at the October meeting

29. Gerry Hamersley said that as the Programme develops Natural England needed to turn attention to how Axis 2 can support climate change adaptation and mitigation, which includes promoting renewable energy sources other than energy crops.

30. Peter Hardaker mentioned the recent Defra report on food waste. He said the Programme had a role in reducing waste in the food chain. Kevin Ward added that the Environment Agency was looking at waste challenges and some of the ways to utilise waste.

31. Gerry Hamersley said that we needed to think about bringing in other groups, experts and opinions to help with Programme integration and to help truly understand the needs of the end beneficiary. Andrew Slade proposed using a future meeting as a wider workshop for the Group to reflect on how things had gone over the last year and to consider the big issues on the horizon. Andrew suggested the workshop be extended to include others with immediate interest in the Programme, including the wider Defra family.

Action: the January meeting to be converted into a wider RDPE workshop.

Terms of reference

32. The Group was asked to review the current terms of reference document version 3 dated 23 October 2007. Phil McVey asked how issues for the South West were brought to the attention of the National Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC). Paul Shand said that issues were raised with either Defra policy leads or through the delivery partner's national teams. He added that as well as a PMC there was an internal Defra Programme Board for RDPE.

Action: Paul Shand to circulate PMC terms of reference and membership details.

33. The Group discussed its current membership. Andrew Slade explained that although he had taken up his new post within the RDA it was unlikely a replacement Deputy Regional Director will be in place by the next meeting in October. The Group agreed that Andrew would continue to chair the group until his successor was in place. Andrew also mentioned that this meeting will be Lucy Macaulay's last as she was leaving Natural England at the end of August. He also informed the Group that Helen Thompson from GOSW would take over responsibility for RDPE from Paul Shand within the next month. Andrew passed on his thanks on behalf of the group to Paul Shand and Lucy Macaulay for the support they have provided.

34. Gerry Hamersley said that given restructuring within his organisation Natural England would struggle to find a long-term replacement for Lucy. However, he agreed that Natural England would cover the next meeting on 22 October, but asked the other partners to consider whether they have capacity to provide the secretariat function.

Action: Lucy to produce a note of what the secretariat function involves

Action: The Group to continue to pursue the Technical Assistance issue with Defra and delivery partners to explore what their organisation understands by Technical Assistance in the context of RDPE.

Action: Paul Shand to convene a meeting to discuss secretariats for a wider range of regional groups – including the RIG, RAFF and SSFF

35. The Group agreed that regional budgets and progress against spend would be reviewed at every RIG meeting.

Action: Lucy Macaulay to amend point 29 of the terms of reference.

36. The Group confirmed that no other changes were need to the terms of reference.

Action: Andrew Slade, Paul Shand, Lucy Macaulay and Helen Thompson to meet to discuss handover arrangements

5. Communications and stakeholder engagement

37. Paul Shand presented a paper on joint communications and

stakeholder engagement priorities for the RIG. He asked the group to consider a number of recommendations.

38. The Group acknowledged the benefits of having a joint communications resource and agreed that this approach had been successful under the Objective One Programme. However, with the absence of Technical Assistance the RIG would need to concentrate on a few key priorities in order to join things up. Therefore, the Group agreed that the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Task Group was necessary and should continue to meet at least once a quarter. It was agreed that this group would meet before RIG meetings to identify opportunities for joint comms and continue to make recommendations to the RIG.

39. Phil McVey said that Cornwall County Council and SWRDA meet quarterly with local politicians. He said that this was a good opportunity to raise the profile of RDPE locally.

Action: The Communications Task Group to produce a one page brief setting out the key messages about the Programme

40. The Group discussed whether the merits of producing an exec summary of the RIP or a glossy brochure setting out the SW RDPE aims, objectives and specific projects/programmes. The Group agreed that more work was needed to clarify the aim and target audience for such a brochure.

Action: The Communications Task Group to consider further s SW RDPE brochure/RIP exec summary

Action: All RIG partners to update the website portal and check that the information already held was current

Action: Andrew, Helen and Paul to discuss how to escalate the funding issues for joint communications.

Any other business

53. Gerry informed the Group that Paul Wynne had left Natural England to take up the post of Deputy Chief Executive of Frome Town Council. Martin Gershon would be taking over the SW Natural England external affairs role until formal recruitment had taken place.

Future meetings:

The RIG meetings arranged so far:

22 October 2008 – Central Suite, SWRDA, Exeter

20 January 2009 – Away day – location to be advised