

**South West Regional RDPE Implementation Group Meeting
23rd October 2008 – SWRDA Offices, Sterling House, Exeter
Minutes of Meeting**

Present:

Andrew Slade – Chair, SWRDA
Helen Thompson – GOSW
Gerry Hamersley – Natural England
Ian Piper – SWRDA
Rob Hatt - SWRDA
Ian Hague – SWRDA
Tim de Winton – Environment Agency
Matthew Woodcock – Forestry Commission
Peter Hardaker – Cornwall Agricultural Council
Dominic Rowland - Defra
Matthew Hill – Secretariat, GOSW

Apologies were received from Phil McVey, Bruce Douglas and Tim Wheatley

Welcome

Approval of minutes from 24th July.

1. Minutes of the 24th July 2008 meeting were approved with no amendments.

Defra Update

All welcomed Dominic Rowland from Defra. Dominic gave an update on national RDPE issues.

1. Dominic was as yet unsure of how the recent machinery of government changes would affect work on renewable crops. Defra retains the lead role on climate change adaptation but the policy lead for energy crops has passed to DECC. Dominic felt this would have an impact on the programme rather than the customers. Dominic met with the Rural Development Minister earlier in the week who has a keen interest in the programme, Environmental Stewardship and the Leader + roll out.

2. Andrew Slade asked about the government line on mandatory modulation. Dominic Rowland was unsure of the official line however he felt it no problem to increase compulsory rather than voluntary modulation. He felt there shouldn't be a restriction on what money is spent on in this context.

3. Dominic outlined government plans for Business Support Simplification Programmes (BSSPs) which will affect RDPE. BSSP programmes will be driven through Business Links. This will have an impact on Environmental Stewardship and the Woodland Grant Scheme. The situation with regard to Axes 1/3/4 is more fluid and yet to be determined. Andrew Slade asked if there is a requirement to badge strands under BSSP. Dominic Rowland said that there are three possibilities: i) aligning all RDPE infrastructures with

relevant products; ii) reinventing protection of the natural environment (axis 2) and rolling up RDPE in that; iii) a hybrid alignment where feasible – roll up where feasible.

4. Rob Hatt flagged that there may be capacity issues for Business Links and the wider issue of Business Link gearing up to take on a larger role. Dominic Rowland said this has been flagged with BERR. Dominic also confirmed that there are no more funds in place, beyond what has been already allocated for RDPE delivery.

5. Gerry Hamersley raised the question of Environmental Stewardship. Dominic Rowland said that environmental support is caught up in the sweep of Business Support and part of the BSSP single brand (Solutions for Businesses). Dominic felt that this was unsuitable for Environmental Stewardship/EWGS and the two might be cases for 'exceptional branding status'. Gerry Hamersley felt that this is a tricky area due to the desire to be integrated using REG as an info base. Andrew Slade felt that the spirit of BSSP is about joining up and this is promising but there is a danger in doing so that nothing new will be offered. Andrew felt there was a good solid Defra defence for Axis 2 in scope. 1/3/4 would be a concern due to workload. Rob Hatt felt that the further branding of Solutions for Business does pose the danger of there being too many brands. Dominic Rowland thought that Axis 1/3/4 shouldn't be subject to SFB branding and were looking for an exemption for axis 2.

6. Andrew Slade asked about the Whitehall perception of national roll out. Dominic Rowland felt it was a mixed bag: there are issues around Environmental Stewardship take up; marine issues in 2010; 50% of Environmental Stewardship agreements are up for renewal; Energy Crops Scheme take up in changing political era; some good social projects are coming through; Leader approach excellent and transparent (expect implementation and delivery to happen over the next 12 months. Overall an amber/red rating.

7. Andrew Slade raised the issue of what's going well/good practice and is this being shared? Are good models being circulated? Dominic Rowland said that dissemination of good practice is being led by the CRC under the new National Rural Network being developed.

ACTION: Dominic to see minutes of future RIG meetings

8. Peter Hardaker raised the issue of Technical Assistance (TA). He felt a bottleneck has developed due to a shortage of funding for promotion, evaluation (need to know where we are starting from) and expenses (particularly when engaging with the private sector). At present TA involves only the national rural network, mid term evaluation and final evaluation. Dominic Rowland asked, in terms of practicality, how much does the RIG need for 08/09? In terms of principle, Dominic made clear that Defra funds delivery separately from programme costs. Defra has already put significant funding to delivery organisations for RDPE delivery and would need

compelling evidence that funding is stretched and can't be redeployed. HLS is the only discretionary funding within the RDPE programme so anything required for TA would need to come from that pot. In terms of a figure, Andrew Slade felt that 150k per annum feels about right. Ian Hague said that any money would be used for delivery, not admin. Peter Hardaker felt that anything used for TA would save the programme money and bring in delivery on time. Tim de Winton agreed that the RIG should evaluate its work – he proposed someone pull together a piece of work on how this TA would work and how much it would cost.

9. Rob Hatt pointed out the value in continual evaluation through the life of a project rather than a retrospective assessment – lessons learned after the projects are too late.

Action: Gerry Hamersley said he needs to take a look at give and take within HLS budget and that he'll go back to Natural England to see how to go about doing this.

10. Andrew Slade suggests the next step is to pull together what's needed and sharing with Defra. Andrew Slade stressed that the RIG need to articulate what they are asking for.

ACTION: Helen Thompson to draw up a framework for the TA ask.

2. Delivery Partner Updates

Natural England Update

11. Gerry Hamersley said that there had been little change since the last quarter. The issues remains getting Environmental Stewardship funds out of the door rather than there being a funding issue – as is the perception. NE are working with partners including FWAG and National Parks to help in this and are writing to all existing agreement holders to develop possible capital projects. There are three corporate priorities for Axis 2: i) Delivering PSA 2010 SSSI remedies and renewals; ii) securing spend from existing classic and HLS agreements (maximising RDPE Axis 2 spend within this financial year to 2010); iii) delivering Biodiversity Action Plan (date to be announced soon).

Forestry Commission Update

12. Matthew Woodcock reminded the RIG that FC commits a year ahead of time to ensure flexibility in mind of potential budget cuts. Ongoing work includes looking for 600 hectares of new woodland created; this is currently lower than this on the basis of interest in energy crops; other grants are over-subscribed. The SSSI budget is key as there are hard nuts coming up and FC is looking to NE to gauge at what point legislation might be resorted to. The WIG is targeted and going well. Need to ensure alignment of regional objectives with the new ETWF and national delivery plan.

South West Regional Development Agency Axis 1 and Axis 3 update

13. Rob Hatt presented a paper. Local Action comprises 20% of budget; Business led activity 30% and commissioned activity 50%.

On Business led activity, 450 enquiries have been handled (150 of which may be developed into applications) by the Rural Enterprise Gateway. Most are in the early stages and are all being revisited in view of the changing economic circumstances which will have a big bearing on the spend over the next 18 months. Rob anticipates the effect will be more spend on business support than capital expenditure. The RDA is talking to REG and the accountable body to look at delivery and capacity issues in the light of this and other concerns.

14. In terms of commissioned activity SWRDA are currently behind in time than where they would have wished to have been. Rob reported that there is a good progress on Axis 1 commissions and several milestones are due by the end of the year. Delivery of the Animal Health and Livestock initiative will be early 2009.

15. Development is ongoing for the Agricultural Resource Management (from December 2008). There is an extension of the catchment sensitive farming approach (from a productivity and competence perspective). FC/NE/RDA are meeting on feasibility in the near future. There is also work around waste and energy that links closely to Business Links where RDPE work will build on existing delivery models and add the land based sector. There is an innovation fund where there will be advice and small (10k) grants available and Rob hopes for a good take up.

16. Rob noted that Axis Three commissioned activity is in line with thinking that businesses benefit from 'attractors' rather than business based grants. The sustainable tourism element had been running behind time although was now getting back on track with a limited number of fairly high profile projects coming through. The Social Enterprise element had stalled but one or two Ad hoc projects are in the pipeline using the 'pub in the hub' model.

17. Tim de Winton raised the Uplands package. They have met individually and collectively in September. Dartmoor and Exmoor are not as complicated as Bodmin in terms of structures. Work at present includes. i) Articulation of livestock priorities in the areas, ii) individual projects are coming through – RDA not devolving money to the areas themselves. All three uplands areas within territories of Local Action Groups which was welcomed. Andrew noted that AONBs were very appreciative of the efforts of the team.

18. Matthew Woodcock raised the issue of grant administration – how does this impact on delivery at the front end? Rob Hatt reported that SWRDA had decided to subcontract out back office admin but unfortunately they felt none of the tenders offered sufficient value for money. It was now being taken back in house and how it would be delivered was being worked out however it was difficult to quantify the amount of work involved at present.

South West RDA Axis 4 Local Action Update

19. Ian Hague reported that the launch event was a success and that there have been good responses from the Local Action groups (LAGS). A document has been distributed containing guidance on the queries raised during the main session. Some of the new LAGS are Leader + descendents but there are also some new groups from the Isles of Scilly, mainland Cornwall and the Forest of Dean. Ian reported that the draft delivery plans were very nearly completed; four were already in with the remainder due next month. Hope to approve by end of the calendar year.

ACTION: Ian Hague to circulate the current draft update

20. Tim de Winton asked if the information will be available on the website and Ian confirmed that it will be.

21. Ian Hague also reported that local learning is a key element and that the South West is leading the network and good practice examples are being circulated. Rob Hatt noted that National Parks are covered by the LAGs, as are 13 AONBs. All but two LAGs have protected landscapes. Are they getting involved? Ian Hague felt this is hard to say until receipt of delivery plans.

Strategic Issues

Communications

23. Peter Hardaker suggested the need to bring the stakeholder groups together in a meeting or telekit to inform them of what was happening, raise issues and as a method of communication. Andrew Slade agreed and suggested we move forward with this ASAP. Need to hit end users and bring the disparate together in an easy manner. Ian Piper felt arranging a face to face session could delay this important meeting and in the first instance it would probably be most sensible to arrange an introductory telekit – this telekit being less detailed than the subsequent face to face meetings will be. Ian Piper suggested this is a regular forum for issues to be raised. Gerry Hamersley suggested a telekit is a good idea to help stakeholders feel engaged than move onto the details later on in face to face meetings.

Agreed that we should use existing mechanisms for communications wherever possible. The Sustainable Farming and Food Board, RDA Rural Advisory Group, Regional Environment Network and NE's land management stakeholder group would all be appropriate to engage with at a strategic level for this purpose.

ACTION: Meeting to be arranged by RDA in 3-4 weeks time

24. Peter Hardaker mentioned that that it would be worth having a wider stakeholder event a year after launch. A year after is Feb 2009 so this needs to be planned for soon.

Feedback from communications Sub group

25. Helen Thompson fed back from last week's comms group. Matthew Woodcock, Pat Murray, Martin Gershon attended with Helen. An action from the last RIG was for the comms sub-group to put together a one pager on key RDPE messages and a brochure.

26. The issue of the website (the SWREG/RDPE portal) acting as a first stop for someone that wants to find out more about possible funding (and the brochure should contain some high-level messages that drive people to the more detailed web resource). Matthew Woodcock emphasised the need to join up resource to keep the website updated (hopefully once set up this should not be too labour-intensive). Dominic Rowland mentioned that RDPE North East has a website and it may be worth following up with a conversation with the North east.

ACTION: Helen Thompson and Communication Group members

27. Gerry Hamersley confirmed that Martin Gershon at Natural England can post info on the site but it's a question of joining up to get the information to Martin. Rob Hatt thought that the uploading/collating of information as a fairly big role for someone. Matthew Woodcock also felt that at least the initial work would be considerable.

ACTION: Follow up meeting for Andrew Slade/Helen Thompson/Pat Murray on brigading this further.

28. Helen Thompson reported that the comms group had raised the possibility of attending shows. Andrew was sceptical of their benefit. Matthew felt that if so we need to do this collaboratively as a group. And we need to book soon! Rob Hatt felt the Royal Cornwall would be the best bet.

ACTION: Andrew asked to commission a comms group critique of the various shows.

29. Pat Murray suggested a flyer, downloadable (A3/4 sized) from the website that is a simple point of sale piece of literature that directs people towards the more detailed website.

Secretariat

30. Gerry Hamersley apologised for Natural England's lack of capacity to fulfil the ongoing secretariat resource for the group. Ian Piper asked that we watch this space as there may be a development that sorts this out for the future. Ian will come back on this.

Next meeting

31. An action from the last RIG was to use the next RIG as an opportunity to engage the wider Defra Core Family and others. Unfortunately GOSW have carried out some diary check and Janette Ward (NE) and Richard Cresswell (EA) are unavailable for the 20th Jan which had been provisionally booked. Others to involve are David Rodda and National Parks. Andrew asked if there was still an appetite for this workshop day and the group felt there definitely remains so.

Action: GOSW to look for dates in late January 2009.

32. Andrew Slade said that this would be his last meeting that he acts as chair as Hilary Neal has been appointed as his successor on Defra business at GOSW. He said that he has recently taken on responsibility for rural issues at executive level of SWRDA so will very much remain involved in RDPE delivery.

Tim de Winton thanked Andrew for his chairing of the group and the rest of the group echoed these sentiments. Dominic Rowland noted the good team spirit around the table and thanked the group for the invite.

Future meetings:

January 2009 – Away day – location to be advised