

Rural Affairs Forum – May 2006

Regional Partnership Sustainable Development reports to the Assembly Annual General Meeting

Summary

The Forum recognises and supports the Regional Assembly's adoption of sustainable development as the central theme of its work. In support of this policy the Forum appointed a sustainability ambassador from SWM at the earliest opportunity who is helping advise and support the Forum on sustainability issues. In discussion with the Forum's management group the initial priority actions involved:

- providing members with a briefing on the review of the RSDF.
- Using the sustainability scoping exercise in RSDF version 1 to identify sustainability issues in the emerging Rural Delivery Framework.
- Raising awareness among Forum members of sustainability issues and priorities in the rural West Midlands through the RDF/RSDF sustainability exercise.
- Providing our sustainability scoping exercise helped inform a *Sustainability Appraisal commentary* from a consultant with funding from Sustainability West Midlands, Rural Accord and GOWM.
- Providing comments on the RSDF version 2 consultations based on our task group input on the RSDF/RDF exercise.

Opportunities for contributions in 2006/07

These will include:

- Briefing our members on the revised RSDF (version2) and our plans for using it.
- Following through the sustainability issues in consultation with the RDF team.
- Considering sustainability proofing as part of rural proofing through the RSS Rural Urban linkages reference group and in engagement with the RES review.

Challenges in delivering sustainable outcomes

It is not always clear how the Forum's activities and policy engagement is contributing to sustainable outcomes. We have recommended that sustainability indicators within RSDF 2 will provide some information on trends. Recent work on the RDF suggests that if there are unsustainable or mutually inconsistent national and regional

policies and strategies it is difficult to influence outcomes. The Forum's work with the RDF team could help identify these and provide feedback to the Regional Assembly.

Appendix: Checklist template

Objective	Has the Partnership's work contributed?	How has work contributed/why has it not? Are there any particular barriers or challenges to sustainable outcomes? Opportunities for further contributions in the next 12 months?
Developing thriving sustainable communities:		
Ensuring easy and equitable access to services and opportunities, including jobs and learning, regardless of ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, background or location	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Rural Transport Task Group invited RPTO officers to become part of the Group bringing a county focus across the 5 Shire Counties – highlighting progress with programmes including Wheels to Work and Bus to Work and Back within the region.
Enabling communities to participate in the decisions that affect their neighbourhoods and quality of life	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Engaged with Rural pathfinder projects in Shropshire and Staffordshire. West Midlands and Mid Wales Cross Border issues – Consultancy and Report Framework for Action now being taken forward with colleagues from Mid Wales as an event in the Autumn of 06.
Addressing poverty and disadvantage, taking into account the particular difficulties of those facing multiple disadvantage	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Forum is a stakeholder group representing the issues and concerns of rural people and raises issues with regional partner during development and review of regional strategies to ensure poverty and disadvantage is addressed. The development of the Rural Delivery Framework has included these within its Action Plan.
Improving health and reducing health inequalities by encouraging and enabling healthy lifestyles as well as protecting health and providing health services	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Provided comments on Sign Up For Sport consultation and communicated this to Forum members. Engaged with report on Mental Health in Rural Areas to improve health.

Objective	Has the Partnership's work contributed?	How has work contributed/why has it not? Are there any particular barriers or challenges to sustainable outcomes? Opportunities for further contributions in the next 12 months?
Providing decent and affordable housing for all, of the right quantity, type, tenure and affordability for local needs, in clean, safe and pleasant local environments	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Responded to the government's Affordable Housing Commission and the Commission for Rural Communities research project on rural housing. Provided formal representation on Rural Housing Network and Regional Housing Board.
Reducing crime, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Engaged with concerns over the re-organisation of police forces in the West Midlands.
Improving opportunities to participate in the diverse cultural and recreational activities the West Midlands can offer	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Encouraging physical development with a better balance of jobs, housing and services within each part of the Region in order to meet local needs locally and encourage stable and sustainable integrated communities	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Engaged with the Rural Transport programmes via an appointed Rural Transport Task Group to make recommendations to Forum for engagement - Formal representation on Regional Transport Partnership.
Enhancing and protecting the environment:		
Valuing, enhancing and protecting the Region's environmental assets, including the natural and built environment and the historic environment	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Engaged with the Regional Forestry Framework delivery plan. Engaged with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill. Engaged with the new England Rural Development Plan. Provided formal representation on European Environmental Panel and Regional Environment Partnership. Provided formal representation on Rural Accord.

Objective	Has the Partnership's work contributed?	How has work contributed/why has it not? Are there any particular barriers or challenges to sustainable outcomes? Opportunities for further contributions in the next 12 months?
Valuing, enhancing and protecting regional biodiversity	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Provided formal representation on the Regional Biodiversity Partnership and kept members informed of how to engage with the regional biodiversity strategy.
Land use and development that optimises the use of previously developed land and buildings and creates high quality built environments that incorporate green space, encourage biodiversity, promote local distinctiveness and sense of place, and are well-designed	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Engaged in the partial review of RSS, and the Visitor Economy Strategy for the region.
Local stewardship of local environments	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Minimising air, water and soil pollution levels	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Minimising the Region's contribution to the causes of climate change whilst implementing a managed response to its unavoidable impacts	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

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Using natural resources prudently and efficiently:		
Reducing overall energy use through increasing energy efficiency, and increasing the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Formal representation on SWM with sustainability ambassador appointed to support and advise the Forum. Formal representation on Regional Sustainability forum.
Using natural resources such as water and minerals efficiently	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Promoting and ensuring high standards of sustainable resource-efficient design, construction and maintenance of buildings	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Ensuring the location of development makes efficient use of existing physical infrastructure and helps reduce need to travel, especially by private car	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Increasing use of public transport, cycling and walking and reducing road traffic congestion and pollution	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Transport Task Group appointed by Forum to engage with regional partners to influence development of integrated public transport.
Encouraging and enabling waste minimisation, reuse, recycling and recovery to divert resources away from the waste stream	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

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Encouraging local sourcing of goods and materials	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	All catering for Rural Affairs forum meetings is locally sourced.
Rewarding efficient resource use and encouraging development of alternative and renewable resources where resources are likely to become depleted	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Developing a flourishing, diverse and stable regional economy:		
Achieving sustainable economic growth and prosperity for the benefit of all the Region's inhabitants	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Engaged in consultation and correspondence over Council Directive 2003/85 on Foot and Mouth disease. Wrote to the region's MEP's on EU proposals for sugar beet reform. Provided comments on EU strategy for Rural Development. Provided a scrutiny role on AWM's support for Rural Renaissance. Considered the significance of both the Lisbon agenda and city regions for rural areas.
Creating high quality employment opportunities suited to the changing needs of the local workforce, whilst recognising the value and contribution of unpaid work	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Promoting investment in future prosperity	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Forum promoted an increased awareness of the role of the growing environmental economy and engaged with partners in influencing its delivery. It was consulted at every stage of the development of the Regional Delivery Framework and challenged on behalf of the rural customer.

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Encouraging ongoing investment and engagement in learning and skills development	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Formal representation on Rural Skills Leadership group.
Encouraging a culture of enterprise and innovation	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Promoting and supporting the development of new technologies, especially those with high value and low impact	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Encouraging corporate social and environmental responsibility, with regional organisations and agencies leading by example	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	The Forum has members who represent seven sectors nationally, regionally and sub-regionally and has influenced Regional, sub-regional and local partners re RDF, RSS, Black Country study.