



## “RDPE: Taking Stock and Sharing Knowledge” 11<sup>th</sup> June 2010, Castle Green Hotel, Kendal

### WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

#### Introduction

During the afternoon, participants were divided into 6 groups for a 90 minute workshop session. During the first half of the workshop each group heard from 3 beneficiaries of RDPE funding. These case studies gave an overview of their projects and shared their experience of the RDPE process before answering questions.

The remaining half of the workshop was spent with participants identifying and discussing common threads from the case studies presented, exchanging their own experiences of RDPE and ingredients for success and finally suggesting ways of securing the best possible RDPE outcomes for the remainder of the programming period.

The following information reflects the discussion notes captured from each of the 6 afternoon workshop groups. It has not been interpreted and has been transcribed as it appeared on the flipcharts on the day.

#### Workshop Write-ups



Facilitator: Andy Dean

Case studies: Abbott Lodge Jersey Ice Cream, Coastal Grains and Cumbria Woodlands

- One programme needs to learn from any previous experiences
- Keep structures the same for the next programme if possible
- In the North East projects are still coming forward despite the challenges
- Uncertainty over regional delivery structures – where does this leave local and national delivery?
- RDA (NE) review process every six months
- Tensions at border regions over what can be done in one region over another
- In NW there is sub regional delivery through local action groups
- Localisation
- LAGs having the same amount of control across England – rules are set by RDAs
- Tackling future issues for future programmes



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- Whatever happens there must be EU money to help rural communities
- Cross departmental issues at national government level

### Summary to feed back to main room:

*"We want to maintain the availability of EU funds for rural development facilitated regionally and delivered locally. 'If it isn't broke don't fix it'".*



Facilitator: Sue Bevan

Case studies: Abbott Lodge Jersey Ice Cream, Coastal Grains and Cumbria Woodlands

### Process, bureaucracy and length of application

- Leader N Yorkshire - within 6 weeks
- Northumberland Upland LAG - 3 months

So what are we going to do about it?

- Get relevant partners to work together to work out how they can work smarter
- Does everyone in the process add value?
- Managing the trust is the answer
- How to become more efficient in what we are doing? – Does everyone involved in the process add value?
- Accountable body needs to act as a facilitator rather than enforcer
- Keep a constant dialogue going with all involved
- Focus on quality projects; focus on the projects and stop getting bogged down in the process
- Go out and see the projects to help them develop the project – don't do it from the office
- Look at what is possible i.e. the process can be flexible
- Once approved reduce stages an application has to go through

### Harmonising funding regimes

- Why not use existing structures e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships? SRB Management Board. Would this approach actually understand local needs, local identities and local opportunities?
- Stop changing structures e.g. why not use existing Leader + LAGs as well as creating new LAGs to cover more of England?
- We lose capacity if we keep reinventing new delivery structures

### How can we make the most of remaining funding?

- Have the next post 2013 programme planned before it starts – for continuity and seamless transition
- Use new government and mid-term evaluation to really listen to and tackle these process issues
- Help accountable bodies / delivery bodies to be less scared of the audit process so the process fits what is actually needed – lighten up!!



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- Standardising auditing requirements
- Don't audit a project more than once
- With regards to auditing; learn from each other
- We want light touch audit, getting rid of the risk adverse nature of officers. Use new government and mid-term evaluation to tackle the audit process.



Facilitator: Adrian Banford

Case studies: Abbott Lodge Jersey Ice Cream, Coastal Grains and Cumbria Woodlands

- Promises to reduce bureaucracy are not honoured
- Integration across the axes is not easy
- Large capital projects are subject to no more scrutiny than small scale projects
- Interpretation of rules differ geographically and at different decision-making layers
- Amateurs' role should be to improve projects rather than only dealing with the application requirements
- Distinction needs to be made between grant giving programme and rural development / community development programme
- Trust is gained through continuity in delivery mechanisms
- RDAs took on RDPE from standing start and the culture and working practices hang differently
- LAGs should allocate a member as a project champion. Added value but training needed in coaching and mentoring.



Facilitator: Neil Harrison

Case studies: Kentmere Hydro, Learning Fields and Overwater Marina

### Common themes from the case studies

- Planning – getting through the regulations to achieve your objectives
- Accidents of talents located nearby
- Having a “leader” or “champion” for your project / community group / idea
- Group of committed individuals taking an idea forward. Innovation required and RDPE can support this.
- Reform of the CAP can encourage innovation e.g. For Overwater Marina – milk prices meant the farmer had to look to diversify.
- Bureaucracy and red tape – 1) stifling innovation 2) jeopardising projects 3) increasing costs 4) affecting morale 5) causing delays
- Need perseverance and commitment of volunteers. The volunteers' time is one of the hidden costs
- Communication between agencies and joined up thinking needed
- Case studies today have managed to install a long term change

### Group experience of RDPE

- When Leader projects have gone for wider RDPE funding they have encountered problems due to paper work with impenetrable language and terminology. Often have to employ someone to decipher!



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- Participation of LAG members is paramount and inspiring

### How we make the most of the funding for the remaining period?

- Focus our efforts by finding out the needs of the beneficiaries
- Innovation
- Are structures and support mechanisms in place for fine tuning the programme as it goes along, so that it is able to respond and be flexible?
- Flexibility is key to the success of the RDPE
- Courage
- Evaluation amnesty! Turn them all in so we can all learn from them
- Share to learn

### **Summary to feed back to main room:**

*“Focus our efforts, have the courage to persevere and embrace innovation”.*



Facilitator: Polly Gibb

Case studies: Kentmere Hydro, Learning Fields and Overwater Marina

### Common threads

- Statutory issues and timescales of ‘regulators’ (not just RDAs but planning in the NE)
- Timescales in terms of project development are often very long
- Community benefits are key
- RDPE solves a problem and does a good job once the money gets there. Made a difference to innovative projects
- Skills and experience level in applicants is high but still requires support
- Amount of energy and determination required of applicants. Lends itself to people with certain capacity but what about those who lack abilities?
- Projects require a mix of skills and people. This makes it difficult for many farmers. It is often very much the individuals who succeeded getting the funding.
- Getting to farmers is difficult. Need to have a few successful and visible projects then people can see and hear, by word of mouth, what can happen.
- Have to keep going with the publicity for farmers
- Evaluation picking up on links and relationships between axes? Often there are links in case studies
- People working on RDPE often don’t know what each other are doing at a local level. Piecing together is difficult, even for those who work on it.

### Good practice

- English Food and Farming Partnership monitor farms
- Skills – RDA determined to make it happen in NE. RDA is proactive
- Livestock and Dairy higher level skills doing good work in the NE
- Leader – working across regional boundaries; building experience of how to do rural development.



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## Securing good outcomes

- Good face to face advice
- Consultants who prepare business plans
- Where still regarded as a grant giving programme we need to think strategically about what the region wants from it
- Ability to fit projects in that aren't quite fitting in the boxes
- Recognising success, need to have a thorough understanding of outputs and evaluation. Recording and monitoring success well. Consultancy moving the goal posts?
- Guidance – should be careful not to restrict innovation and quality of work.
- Who are the beneficiaries? Recipients can be put against each other but all for rural development. How target groups can work together?
- Integration of environmental, social and economic.

## Sentence drafting ideas

- Addressing constraints around programme with lots of potential
- Removing barriers, flexibility
- Barriers both internal and external to RDPE
- Individuals and groups and their role in making things happen
- Determination
- Steering a person with drive through the programme

## **Summary to feed back to main room:**

*“RDPE should enable individuals and communities to make things happen within an overarching strategy. It's about removing barriers and constraints, flexibility, potential and opportunity. We need more appropriate measures of value / outcomes of the Leader approach....and one size does not fit all....need local accountability, flexibility and integration”.*



Facilitator: Polly Gibb

Case studies: Kentmere Hydro, Learning Fields and Overwater Marina

## Common threads

- Applicants had combination of passion, expertise and were well networked
- Stable and trusting relationship between applicants and RDPE delivery people
- Constant changing and re-branding of names causes confusion with service users
- Help and funding needs to be tailored to projects. Development of social, economic and environment takes time and expertise; not straightforward like economic objectives
- Continuity of relationships within RDPE delivery relationships
- There are no instruments for measuring social and cultural benefits and goods. RDPE funding evaluations need to consider the social and other factors which often go hand in hand with RDPE projects
- Too complicated; needs to be joined up at all levels



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## RDPE delivery

- Not many people know about it. No PR, only the switched-on know.
- Communication could be improved if there was less people but more trust
- There is confusion about everything that links to RDPE
- Get rid of logos. Why are they obsessed with branding?!
- In spite of the horrors there is a great network of people to help applicants through
- Not straightforward. Development of social, economic and environmental benefits takes longer; this should be tailored into the projects' allocated time.
- Need translator for language as the terminology is too difficult.
- What happens to those without the skills to put in a funding application that can be successful? Who or what can help them? What about those who fail?
- No consistency of rural support coverage
- Up front funding needed

## Good practice

- Shetland example
- LAGs working, sharing and co-operating
- Delivery mechanisms need to be flexible
- More help for complex projects

## Future

- Targeting of the rural poor
- Continuity of staff leading to trust
- Priorities beyond 2013: 1) Broadband 2) Climate change 3) Poverty targeting
- Target causes not consequences
- Many of the practices are contradictory; Local jobs and strategic development

## **Summary to feed back to main room:**

*“RDPE is about creating success; this is illustrated by people’s stories. RDPE needs simplicity, continuity, simple language and a ‘joined up’ working. It needs to get rid of its target driven culture”.*

Plenary feedback session: Chaired by Alastair Beacon, Westley Consulting

In addition to the summary points from the workshop discussions, the following comments were shared during the final plenary session:

- RDPE should not be driven by targets; targets show numbers but not always value for money
- The case studies were all presented by individuals who were prepared to take a risk and innovate. Risk management of public funds stifles innovation (unless that money is earmarked as high risk)



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- The role of public bodies is to make sure conditions are right to promote innovation and entrepreneurialism
- Leader can help provide a good balance between risk and innovation to get rid of the level of bureaucracy
- Innovation can be trying something completely new but also bringing existing ideas in from Europe
- There is lots of potential for innovation as long as there are other strands of funding to implement the idea and share the learning from that innovation, otherwise people can suffer from “innovation fatigue”
- The post code lottery for funding is unacceptable, it should be universally accessible
- No clear definition from Defra as to what constitutes an “eligible area”
- We need to focus our efforts, have the courage to persevere and embrace innovation.