



**‘Maximising Rural Regeneration through RDPE: Local Action’
16th March 2010, 10.30 to 16.30, The Studio - Birmingham**

Summary of Discussion and Action Points

1. Introduction

In response to requests from local authorities, the RDPE Network and Rural Services Network are working together to deliver a series of four workshops focused on ‘Maximising Rural Regeneration through RDPE’.

These workshops aim to provide the opportunity for local authorities to share and exchange ideas, practice and experience of how RDPE can be utilised within their territories to sustain their economic and environmental agendas. The workshops through 2010-11 will focus on the 'local action', 'environmental support', 'business support' and 'integrated rural development' elements of RDPE delivery.

The purpose of this first workshop focused on the ‘local action’ elements of RDPE delivery was too:

- Share ideas, experience and practice amongst local authorities from those already participating in Local Action Groups;
- Identify new opportunities and approaches for local authorities to become involved in the Local Action Group delivery process; and
- Identify challenges and seek solutions to more effective engagement in Local Action Group delivery by local authorities.

2. Workshop Programme

The emphasis of the day was on active participation. Each session was opened by an individual providing a short overview of his/her experience in order to prompt discussion. Participants were then divided into three working groups¹ to further explore and share approaches to each of the topics:

- **Introduction to the Day and overview of the RDPE Network and RSN**
Rebecca Frost, RDPE Network - CRC and Ivan Annibal, RSN
- **Session 1 - Setting the scene: Leader in Practice from an RDA Perspective**
Initial overview: Richard Tulloch, EMDA
- **Session 2 - Setting the scene: Sharing Ideas, Experience and Practice in the Delivery of RDPE through the Leader Approach**
Initial overview: Stuart Evans, Northumberland National Park Authority

¹ The make-up of which changed after each session.

- **Session 3 - Accountable Body Roles, Challenges and Approaches**
Initial overview: Justin Brown – Lincolnshire County Council
- **Session 4 - Building Community Capacity**
Initial overview: Helen Wright – East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- **Session 5 - Direct Asset Involvement**
Initial overview: Clare Leverton – Cornwall County Council
- **Summing Up and Key Outputs from the Day**
Ivan Annibal, RSN and
Dave Melling, Bradford Metropolitan District Council

All presentations and information from this workshop are available via the RDPE Network website:
<http://www.rdpnetwork.org.uk/activities/all-activities/maximising-rural-regeneration-through-rdpe-local-action>

3. Next Steps

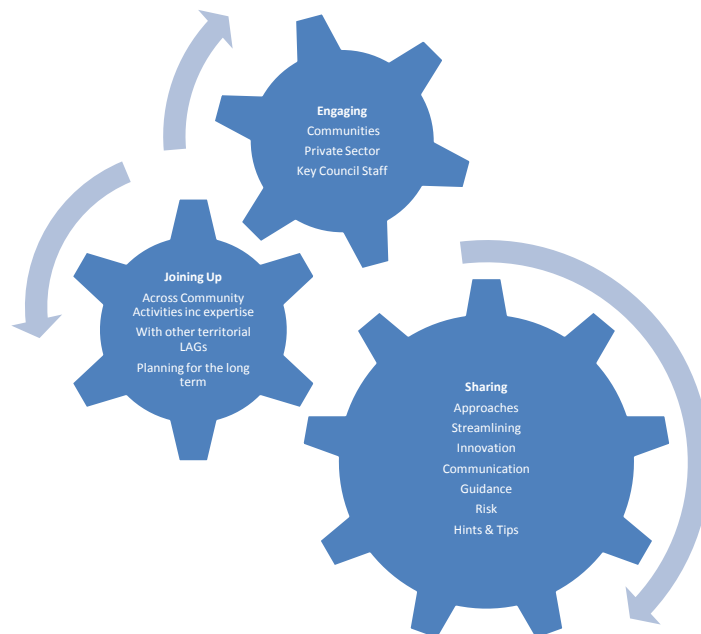
During the last session of the workshop asked participants to:

- i) Confirm the key points from the day, to be fed back to Defra and the delivery bodies;
- ii) Identify one action that they would follow up as a result of the day.

3.1 Key Points:

Overall:

Hard for this [RDPE] to happen without “us” [local authorities]. Local Authorities have a key role to play in making the most of RDPE, for England’s rural communities, environment and economy, through engaging, sharing and joining-up:



Accountable Body Role:

- Formal method for mapping approaches and techniques in terms of local authority role - include forms and examples of methods that work;
- Share approaches to streamlining systems across regions and partnerships where the experience of RDA approaches is variable;
- Innovation over the use of funding is tricky due to inflexible regional operating framework – although much of this inflexibility is from EU rules;
- Cluster of expertise and capacity makes accountable body role a local authority “usp”;
- Mainstreaming of rural within councils can sometimes isolate Leader accountable body roles, resulting in lack of join-up and realising benefits internally;
- Local authority and statutory partnership “soup” makes it hard for LAGs to engage with the bigger picture as it is very confusing;
- There are potential benefits to develop, linked to more networking working amongst RDAs e.g. standard guidance;
- Innovation vs Risk is at the heart of the dilemma facing the accountable body in facilitating good projects;
- Delegation, imagination and derogation for very small projects could make a real difference but is challenging in terms of the current rules.

Building Community Capacity:

- Lack of clarity around who the local authority staff engaged with LAGs, serve? Is it the LA or LAG?
- Challenge of linking and aligning community activities of local authorities and making sure the work of LAGs are properly integrated;
- Challenge of engaging private sector and examples of best practice;
- “Lonely Planet” approach to hints and tips of how the life cycle of a LAG will play out in terms of its needs and effectiveness would be useful;
- The importance of community development arising as a core outcome from the work of LAGs and the need to measure it and plan for its longevity in terms of exit strategies – importance of taking risks and engaging/building private sector capacity in this context;
- Challenges around harnessing the right expertise to support the development of LAG members and practices;
- Scope to enhance local authority networking at a sub-regional/regional level over Leader/LAG support;
- Challenges of embedding the identification of projects within a community owned and bottom up process.

Direct Asset Involvement:

- Devolution of resources can build community capacity;
- Local authorities can provide matched funding to access resources from 3rd parties including RDPE;
- Disposal/endowment of properties often needs to be done along with practical support in managing and maximising the use of the asset from the authority to the community recipients;
- Can provide an asset base for long term sustainability after project funding has ended;
- Local authority “bank-rolling” can help with the successful implementation of projects;
- Asset transfer should be thought of alongside the opportunities linked to other asset maximisation including resources such as landscapes and footpaths.

3.2 Follow-up Action

In additions to the key issues and activity identified above, participants fed in their reflections and comments about the day via a feedback form. 100% of participants said that they found the workshop either useful or very useful and they identified the following actions that they would act on as a result of being involved in the workshop:



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas

- Network;
- Look to learn from the small projects;
- Take up suggestions on how to engage private sector in the LAG group;
- Reinforce the notion of enterprise and income generation as central to the purpose of LAG;
- Highlight RDPE funding possibilities during discussions with Local Authorities and Local Councils;
- Promote local authority involvement in RDPE;
- Investigate the Council projects – this would be useful for dealing with projects coming from Parish councils;
- Inform LAG;
- National guidance – bring it up with RDA.

4. Additional Information

Through the day a number of sources of information were identified as useful, these links are below:

Breakdown of RDPE measures against which LAGs can deliver -

<http://www.rdpenetwork.org.uk/assets/files/Measures%20and%20LAG%20table%20for%20RSN%20event.pdf>

LAG directory for England - <http://www.rdpenetwork.org.uk/your-network/local-action-groups>

RDPE Network projects database - <http://www.rdpenetwork.org.uk/projects>

Regional RDPE thematic priorities (see pages 45-46) -

<http://www.rdpenetwork.rroom.net/assets/files/RDPE%20Network%20Report%20-%20Short.pdf>

Basic Guide to the Leader Approach - <http://www.uknationalruralnetwork.org.uk/the-leader-approach-a-basic-guide>

5. Discussion Sessions

The following table captures the main points of discussion from each session, as captured by the facilitator on the day.

Session 1 - Setting the scene: Leader in Practice from an RDA Perspective

Session 2 - Setting the scene: Sharing Ideas, Experience and Practice in the Delivery of RDPE through the Leader Approach

- How do we [local authorities] support distinctive and independent LAGs in view of the RDPE rules?
- Clear scope for greater involvement of local authorities in the process of helping LAGs through the complex maze of public sector partnerships and accountabilities;
- Local authorities have a key role to play supporting LAGs through their technical and overall capacity;
- Is spend being slowed down by the challenge of navigating rules which mitigate against any form of perceived “risk”?
- How realistic is it to hope that the RDPE administrative processes might be simplified?
- More consistency across RDAs in communicating the regulatory RDPE guidance would be helpful;
- High LAG administrative costs in some areas are: a) not good; b) driven in part at least by the

RDPE administrative demands.

Session 3 - Accountable Body Roles, Challenges and Approaches

- No standard guidance to underpin uniformity of action/regulation;
- Without the above, discretion cannot be managed effectively;
- Some potential for very small grants which could make a local difference is “snuffed out” because of the scale of bureaucracy in managing the admin processes;
- There is scope for a discussion with RDAs about flexibility in processes and rules (Lincolnshire experience);
- Need to feed our learning, in terms of the unsatisfactory nature of some of this into 2013 planning;
- Clear and well thought through communications strategies between: applicants, potential applicants and local authorities and RDAs are important in overcoming some of the problems identified – so everyone knows what they are getting into and what the challenges are;
- Some projects coming to LAGs could best be dealt with via the main programme;
- LAG support is sometimes isolated from other systems and activities around rural and communities in local authorities and we need to think about how we can better join up our act internally in some cases.

Session 4 - Building Community Capacity

- Challenge for programme staff in local authorities, to set out who “owns me” local authority or LAG?
- Good quality engagement of the private sector in LAGs is tricky but very important – (Hampshire and Lincolnshire have some interesting experience on this score);
- Scope to join LAGs up with key LSP and Community Strategy Groups where there is a mutual interest (Lancashire example);
- Need to get the balance right between LAG officers managing administration, thus freeing LAG members up to lead on direction issues, without getting to the position where they are “spoon fed” – The local authority should seek to be seen as an “equal partner”;
- There is scope to join support for LAGs up with the other community support activities of councils but these links are not always straightforward or made within councils;
- RCCs have an important role to play in supporting LAGs in a number of examples;
- More “back office” joining up of the processes and systems of funding agencies (Total Place?) could help LAGs be more effective and less technically challenged;
- Is enough being done to engage LAGs with Town and Parish Councils in an effective dialogue?
- Bottom up is genuinely important in making LAGs work (great examples in Northumberland National Park);
- Effective community engagement in this process needs resources from outside of RDPE and needs an effective communications strategy not just an “organic” process of keeping in touch;
- Other council objectives around community capacity and area regeneration can be achieved through the LAG process;
- There is a “lifecycle” element to the evolution of LAGs and confidence to an extent comes with their growing experience over time – informal guidance on “the typical phases and evolution of LAGs” would be very helpful;
- LAGs can be developed in conjunction with and networked into existing community networks for maximum impact and value;
- Interesting angles need more thought about the scope for LAGs to support social enterprise;
- Ensuring LAGs are truly representative and regularly refreshed is a challenge.

Session 5 - Direct Asset Involvement

- Leases and buildings transferred to the community make very useful contributions to effective LAG projects;
- In some cases land and footpaths can also be part of these approaches;
- Where this happens most effectively it is underpinned by good corporate thinking across the whole council about the scope to transfer assets and build community capacity;
- In some cases, assets themselves can be significantly enhanced for the community through this process where council funding may have been tight;
- Helping with the cash flow issues linked to the implementation of projects using council resources is both possible and effective (Cornwall);
- Other examples of potential transfer: play areas, public realm, cycle routes;
- Technical support to get the 'legals' and management right in terms of asset transfer is also important;
- There is significant best practice in pockets across England which could be gathered and shared.

Further information:

RDPE Network
www.rdpnetwork.org.uk
 E-mail: rdpenetwork@ruralcommunities.gov.uk
 Tel: 01242 521381
 Twitter: www.twitter.com/RDPENetwork

Rural Services Network
www.rsnonline.org.uk
 Tel: 01522 563510



The European Agricultural
Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural
areas