



**‘Maximising Rural Regeneration through RDPE: Environmental Support’  
28<sup>th</sup> October 2010, 10.30 to 16.30, Beech House - Lincoln**

**KEY MESSAGES AND ACTION POINTS**

**1. Introduction**

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

These workshops have aimed to provide the opportunity for local authorities to share and exchange ideas, practice and experience on how RDPE can be used within their territories to sustain their economic and environmental agendas. Completed workshops have focused on the 'local action' elements of RDPE delivery and the environmental and business support on offer. The remaining workshop will round off this series, looking at ‘integrated rural development’ within the context of RDPE delivery.

This third workshop was about the “business support” that is available through the RDPE. Its purpose was to:

- Explore the range of business support facilities available via the RDPE;
- Discuss and communicate different approaches in the development of RDPE business support activities;
- Consider the practical challenges and solutions to accessing RDPE funding to support businesses; and
- Identify the potential roles and opportunities for local authorities to support the development of businesses in their communities through RDPE.

**2. Workshop Programme**

The emphasis of the day was on active participation. The workshop was split into 4 sessions, each providing a different perspective on RDPE environmental support and opened by an individual who provided a short overview of his/her experience in order to prompt discussion. For the remainder of the session participants were divided into small working groups, the make-up of which changed after each session so as to encourage networking opportunities. During this time participants had the opportunity to comment on the ideas and points raised by the speaker and to share their own experiences on the topic.

The complete [programme, speaker presentations, session discussions and other information](#) from this workshop are available via the [RDPE Network](#) website.



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### 3. Next Steps

The key messages from the small group discussions were fed back in plenary during the closing session of the day and are outlined below. These will be forwarded to Defra and the delivery bodies as part of the follow-up activity to this event.

#### 3.1 Key Messages:

##### **Session 1: The perspectives and partnership opportunities arising from the role of Higher and Further Education Bodies in Business Support**

The role of Higher and Further Education (H/FE) providers in delivering and facilitating effective RDPE proposals should be positively encouraged.

There is limited capturing of practice where it currently happens in this context and more work could be done to explore how to more substantively engage the H/FE sector in RDPE.

Lateral thinking about the evolution of Local Enterprise Partnerships and the evolution of the administration arrangements for RDPE could provide an opportunity in relation to the above.

##### **Session 2: The Business Link perspective and the changing landscape for business support**

There is significant uncertainty about how the proposed changes to Business Link, the Solutions for Business Portfolio and the administration of RDPE will impact on the generation and management of RDPE support for rural businesses.

The uncertainty poses risks to both the delivery of the programme and the quality of applications coming forward under RDPE. An information and effective transition strategy should be put in place and communicated to RDPE stakeholders (in the widest sense) as soon as possible.

In taking forward new arrangements two key principles are important – universal quality and locally relevant support. This support should be available at a time and ideally a location, to suit the needs of potential applicants for RDPE support.

##### **Session 3: The “on the ground” challenges of generating good business support projects from the perspective of a Local Action Group**

There is some variance in the way RDPE funding decisions are made across England and examples of practice currently exchanged through the RDPE Network are highly valued.

In the current climate of transition and recession it is important to encourage imaginative and strong locally referenced responses to applications – which must nonetheless remain within the rules and principles of the programme.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the local context of RDPE through the current transition away from regional administration which needs to be carefully considered – this is not necessarily incompatible with a move to national management but will need local intermediaries if it is to work well. Is there a LEP context here?

##### **Session 4: A regional overview of business support through the RDPE across Axes 1 and 3**

There are already challenges to the roll out of funding and hitting spending targets – there is a danger that the current transition arrangements will exacerbate them.



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The situation is further complicated by the redrawing of arrangements for business support and the funding cuts proposed for Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

Local authorities and LEPs could have a key role “downstream” from any further centralisation of RDPE delivery arrangements and consideration of this should be a key element of the finalisation of transition arrangements.

RDPE funding underpins broader sustainability in many places and should not be considered in isolation in terms of the evolution of its administration.

Leader partnerships are a ready made model for effective approaches to the challenges of the new “localism” agenda in rural areas.

### 3.2 Follow-up Action

In addition 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 carry out as a result of attending the workshop:

- Link in more with our Further Education and Higher Education sector regarding food and drink;
- Think flexibly to project delivery – ask why can’t we do it this way?
- Set up a rural business advisory group, but my dilemma is that as a regional policy advisor it makes a lot of sense to have a regional network but not sure what is going to be left of that. Perhaps a role for the East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum?;
- Further investigate opportunities to learn best practice in business support for rural businesses;
- Build closer working relationships with area Local Action Groups;
- Share learning with Surrey Hills LAG;
- Work to see if we can engage with Business Link;
- I would like contact details for all the event attendees;
- Getting more info on topics discussed and review our approach to make sure we are doing our best;
- To take back to our LAG that our RDA may be a major hindrance but others (not all) are in the same boat, be resilient and carry on!
- To find out what more I can do to promote RDPE regeneration;
- Contact my RDA to make sure RDPE links (currently non-existent) and try to squeeze any business support funding from our Leader programmes;
- Ensure continued network development;
- Find out more about Business Link, apply for an RDPE diversification grant on adding value to wheat and fruit;
- Link up with colleagues from other Business Link regions;
- Revisit contacts to get better engagement with Business Link, accountants, NFU, local authorities (post restructuring), get projects posted onto the RDPE Network’s online project database and make more use of the RDPE Network website;
- Make more use of the RDPE Network website;
- Pass on information gained today to membership; and
- Look at Business Link’s farmers’ webpage.



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#### 4. Further information:

RDPE Network

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Rural Services Network

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