



## “Maximising Rural Regeneration through RDPE: Environmental Support” 8<sup>th</sup> July 2010 - The Studio, Birmingham

### WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

#### Introduction

This event was delivered in partnership with the Rural Services Network, in order to:

- Share ideas, experience and practice amongst local authorities from those already participating, supporting or accessing funding for environmental activities;
- Identify new opportunities and approaches for local authorities to become involved in supporting the accessing of funding and generation of outputs and outcomes in relation to the RDPE environmental support agenda; and
- Identify challenges and seek solutions to more effective engagement in the RDPE environmental agenda.

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

#### Discussion Write-ups

##### **Session 1: Environmental Stewardship on council land – Red Table**

- £13 million = confirmed budget
- Forestry Commission budgets 2010-11 and 2011-12 delivered as planned
- Building relationships = very important! Trust
- National Park playing facilitation role
- Northumberland National Park Authority
  - Training scheme – 100% funded by RDPE. Carousel approach to training
  - Upland farmer trainee skills - LANTRA
  - Value of traditional skills – LAG

- Skills need coming through from Higher Level Stewardship (Lancashire). But still shortage, therefore possible joint project with LAG?
- West Midlands (Forestry Commission) and SW regions running apprenticeships on forestry to address woodland skills gaps
- Need evidence to justify skills gaps
- Need to get people into farming industry
  - there will be an ongoing need for these skills
- Evidence exists to justify funding spent on skills training and apprenticeships
- Making it Local LAG and Forestry Commission and FE local college and private business to deliver apprenticeship training; focus on environmental and forestry skills
- CCRI report on environmental stewardship benefits - available on RDPE Network website
- Fear of mixing funding streams (Axis 2)
  - Perception from Forestry Commission – fear of mixing Natural England and Forestry Commission Axis 2 funding streams
  - Not just a big land owner opportunity – lots of small landowners getting involved (i.e. Local Authority landowners in urban areas)
  - What is the national pattern – what could we do about it?

### **Key Points:**

- 1) The importance of relationships and trust between landowners, Local Authorities, delivery bodies in identifying and delivering environmental objectives;
- 2) There are gaps in countryside skills but there are also good examples of RDPE funded training and apprenticeship schemes around the country e.g. Northumberland Uplands, WM, SW;
- 3) You can mix Natural England and Forestry Commission Axis 2 funds; and
- 4) Not just large land owners who can utilise Axis 2 funds – don't forget about small landowners such as urban Local Authorities and local communities – so engage the local community to identify opportunities – positive and less positive experiences of doing this, so share opportunities e.g. Northumberland Uplands vs. Bradford.

### **Session 1: Environmental Stewardship on council land – Silver Table**

- Landscape Partnership
  - Measure 323 for some funding
  - Any other £ available from other axes?
    - Higher Level Stewardship
    - Landfill funding e.g. Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC)
    - Capital money which has been ring fenced (BMDC)

- Shropshire will encourage farmers to move to HLS (Müller). 100% uptake to questionnaire sent out to Müller Farmers
- Graziers – getting the right grazier with the right number of livestock at the right time of year for the land. Layback land is what graziers struggle with
- Are farmers more likely to diversify as more traditional farming methods may not be as lucrative?
- Some tenants bid in their own right for funding. FLAG (Tenancy agreement in place – Hampshire CC)
- Main supermarkets are requiring farmers to meet HLS requirements in order to buy their milk (e.g. Sainsburys / Waitrose)
- SINCS (Sites of Important National Conservation) in Hampshire for landfill sites. There may be scope to use a biodiversity angle to access funding. National Indicator 197 – used as a lever to get HLS
- Landfill sites with public access could offer an “access to nature” angle = public benefit
- Targeting – almost guaranteed to get funding if you have a SSSI in the target area. Target areas are listed on Natural England’s website
- Shropshire – the idea is to get key players to see if an integrated approach will maximise funding. Hampshire experience is that it can get difficult when it comes to sharing the single amount of money received
- Cashflow – payment amounts for parties are set out in the HLS and there is a signed agreement for the duration. Capital payments are less predictable
- Single Farm payments on Country Parks that are grazed – this has been done in Hampshire

### **Key Points:**

- 1) It *can* be done and *should* be done. The concept is simple, just need to overcome the hurdles;
- 2) Work doesn’t necessarily have to be funded under Axis 2. Other works can be used to support Axis 2 funding; and
- 3) Better / clearer RPA remittance advice is required.

### **Session 1: Environmental Stewardship on council land – Blue Table**

- West Oxfordshire does not own lots of land
- Groups want to do work but lack ability to help
- Resources are key
- Can applications be made simpler?
- Is there any way of making sure that applications are accepted i.e. important items to include?
- Capacity of council to do work “in house”
- Funding is European so there are certain factors to be considered

- Case studies to help others to learn
- Share expertise between councils – over the phone to offer advice
- Targets include elements of deprivation in areas that are “wealthy”. How can this be addressed?
- Land that is in an area that is AONB can be seen as having everything already done and new schemes are not needed
- Where can practical help be sought?
- Pressure to spend money
- Awareness of what Natural England does in local council areas
- Issues around central government spending reviews for delivery of RDPE
- Scope to think outside the box
- Resources - to look at the benefits of looking at a programme.
- Making sure that work of NE is explored and intelligence is shared with people that matter
- Helping NE engage with councils – staff limitations
- Communities working only in small areas
- Access to land is very difficult to achieve
- Regional variations

### **Key Points:**

- 1) Significant variability of councils to engage – attitude and interest;
- 2) Importance and value of intelligence shared by Natural England;
- 3) Thinking laterally around RDPE and stewardship by local councils and work with intermediary organisations; and
- 4) What will changing organisational environment mean for all this?

## **Session 2: Local community perspective on RDPE and the environment – Red Table**

- RDPE funding not used as part of the investment strategy at Hill Holt Wood:-
  - lack of information
  - complexity (amount of paperwork for small gain)
  - fear of losing control but EWGs has not meant lack of control; FC involvement has been supportive and offers a deadline (5yr programme) which is helpful.
- Social enterprise must be the model, as so many community groups are reliant on “funding / chase funding”
- Groundwork Project (urban forestry project), Black Country
- The biggest support for social enterprises is saying “yes”, not necessarily the funding
- We need to understand every dynamic of a problem and come up with a simple, practical solution to deal with it which has lots of different benefits
- Sustainability is key – don’t keep throwing money to organisations in the short-term

- Fordhall Farm, Shropshire – funded 2 individuals who needed to raise money to take on the lease at the farm following father’s death. Fundraiser was employed but the 2 individuals themselves were committed enthusiastic, energetic people
- Opportunities for the following through Axes 1, 2, 3 and 4 to utilise sites that are just Axis 2 at the moment:-
  - Primary Healthcare Trusts
  - Probation Service
  - Education Authorities
  - Ministry of Justice
- 3 year Forest Schools programme run by Forestry Commission in the West Midlands was a 3 year pilot but has experienced huge demand. It is a social intervention programme for 16-19yr olds being piloted through Axis 2, but no match funding has been offered. Looking for host to take this programme through Axis 3 to see what results come out
- Opportunity to influence 2007-2013 programme in terms of social interventions because these aren’t currently considered

### **Key Points:**

- 1) Lack of information of RDPE funding across all the Axes and complexity of the programme and delivery mechanisms within it
- 2) Social enterprise as the model – rethink the terminology: investment rather than funding = SUSTAINABILITY
- 3) Holistic approach – “Big Society” concept. Working together e.g. one funding stream can deliver wider benefits than just those specific outputs.

## **Session 2: Local community perspective on RDPE and the environment – Silver Table**

- Local private enterprise helping to deliver objectives
- Community therapy garden – Surrey
- Trading and tourism enterprise - Northumberland National Park Authority (facilitating community enterprise)
- Farm and enterprise officers working with Northumberland National Park Authority = integrated team
- Plunkett foundation - starting research for Defra looking at social enterprises within rural areas
- Using land as education - is this sustainable if it is predominately relying on public funds?
- Should we focus on tradable items?
- Shiply barge – “Dream achievers”, requesting private woodland that is currently available; work with excluded pupils and youths helping them learn barging and conversation skills
- Living on the edge (Northumberland) – getting community involved in the decision making around what to do with an area
  - Northumberland National Park Authority facilitated this but community lead on it – Community Enterprise

- Land was there but the initiative was lost because it was privately owned i.e. perception
- Through contractors and business the whole process is linked back to the community
- 3 quotes contract / tender = problematic
- Hill Holt idea of getting undergraduates in to work voluntarily, then getting them back when graduated for a job
- Off-putting for applicants if they are told to go ahead with a funding application then told to stop / or it gets refused - this means they will be less likely to apply for other funding
- Amount of regulations and rules at each level of office.

### **Key Points:**

- 1) L.A responsibility to play a facilitating role in bringing com and landowners together to take social enterprise approach forward
- 2) Sustainability – were education / therapy etc is being provided through social enterprise model, i.e. publically funded – is this sustainable? Should we be moving towards a more product focused approach?
- 3) Local Authorities' role in supporting commercial / social enterprise without leading – there are lots of examples out there e.g. Bradford and Uplands – please share this
- 4) Grant process – Local authorities' role in identifying opportunities for programme integration and help avoid wild goose chase.

## **Session 2: Local community perspective on RDPE and the environment – Blue Table**

- Lose ideas and potential because of the process
- Lack of communication
- Visibility of decision making
- Early and appropriate engagement
- Everybody likes the idea of social enterprise but don't know how to help
- How does the Dutch system work?
- Where can and how long will it take to get into future programmes?
- How much does the individual driving the project make a difference? Can this be transferred?
- Is it worth using capacity to support and identify projects that will have a particular scheme / idea?
- Risk takers can become a liability
- People who shout loudest will still achieve, the challenge is how to motivate the less confident
- Balance needed between “risk takers” and those who will follow rules
- NE has a special projects fund for countryside stewardship
- Knowledge of finding funds and accessing the funds – requires building of relationships
- Staff turnover when relationships have been built

- NE (E of E) getting on board with local agendas - becoming more proactive / attending to local needs
- Land management teams in NE to engage with local authorities
- Think about what you can offer the other party
- Rural development can be seen as risk adverse
- Can local authorities share risk with other organisations funding projects?

### **Key Points:**

- 1) Risk management (Relationship based) reputation.
- 2) Open and honest communication.
- 3) New opportunities for FC, NE and Local Authorities.

## **Session 3: A strategic perspective – Red Table**

- Make sure that individuals / project officers can communicate with farms – don't forget to listen
- Know farmers working practices
- Using farmers' organisations to help build relationships with farmers
- Understanding dynamics of farming sector
- Don't tell farmers what to do
- In collaboration there is a risk if one partner fails then all will fail
- Projects can succeed at local level but when sent to approving officer rejects application
- Are the targets set for integration too high?
- Assigning officers to help with integration in NE
- Change of focus to local from regional strategy
- Should general public be paying more for food that is purchased – Food security?
- Attending LAG meetings but no LA engagement with RDPE
- Engagement at a strategic level to understand how each can help each other
- Somebody to deal with back office issues and allow others to deliver integration

### **Key Points:**

- 1) Understanding the audience and listen – be farmer friendly
- 2) New opportunity for NE and FC to re-engage with LA
- 3) Focus on integrated rural development
  - Economic
  - Environment
  - Social
  - Resource Use

### Session 3: A strategic perspective – Silver Table

- Do Natural England (NE) officers who visit / engage with farmers have all the info re all the axes? NE tend to focus on agri-environment aspects but don't necessarily have wider business context
- Rural hubs in WM / Worcs / Shropshire are strong networks; able to signpost farmers to available streams of funding
- If farmers can bring in an agri-environment aspect to a project they are more likely to "get into system" but not sure if the same applies from agri-enviro schemes to deliver extra benefit
- In WM, LAGs can only give out Axis 3 but in Cumbria LAGs have access to all axes
- Could signposts be provided on NE publications to other sources of funding axes e.g. for business aspects of a project?
- Information flow doesn't always work effectively – language, presentations etc need to be geared to farmers
- The person working with the farmer needs to engage with the planning department at the outset to find out whether the project idea is viable rather than finding out it is not half-way through the process. Is it in keeping with policy requirements?
- Need to write enough revenue in at the start of the project for 1-to-1 visits, consultants to help with applications, energy audits etc
- Need to leave enough time for planning issues to be resolved during the lifetime of the project
- Cross-boundary integration can be problematic – different NE officers and RDAs etc to liaise with. Priorities, thresholds, budgets, timeframes are often different
- Working together takes more time - will budget and personnel be there in the future?

#### **Key Points:**

- 1) We need to make farmers aware of all available funding streams not exclusively agri-enviro. First point of contact needs to have working knowledge of all the axes
- 2) Ensure the person scoping out the project with the farmer engages with other relevant agencies / bodies (e.g. planners) to ensure project ideas are in line with policy / viable and deliverable. Do this at the outset!
- 3) Collaboration / joint-working is a good thing but requires proper resourcing.

### Session 3: A strategic perspective – Blue Table

- Potential for LAG to help with networking between land manager, farmer etc
- Rural hubs found to be beneficial in West Midlands
- NFU could be used better as an integration tool

- Key responsibility for those organisations involved in RDPE delivery to understanding what is going on in-house and with each other – share understanding
- Distance within different departments
- The key is to get one person there who know AES (agri-environment scheme) and planning and funding
- All delivery officers need an overview of all axis and measures:
  - Officers need to identify opportunities for integration
  - Officers need passion and drive - secondments?
- Integration within department / organisation as well as axis
- “Working our woodlands”
  - Example of integration – LAG project: Making it Local
- Lack of capacity of LAGs to engage with farmers due to own budgeting restraints
- Lack of understanding amongst delivery officers
- Having the right person visiting farm but farmers having access to all info at a local level (such as above)

#### **Actions:**

- Making it Local - circulate agenda for funding workshops
- Circulate Axes and Measures table

#### **Key Points:**

- Training of delivery bodies (RDA, NE and FC) officers to enable them to understand integration and each others’ grant opportunities
  - Executive Board needs to free up time of each of the offices to give time to talk to each other about the above. Quality and passion of staff = important.
- LA and delivery bodies need to work together to identify individuals who can think outside the box and identify integrated opportunities and can communicate this and have the resource to do this. Do Counsellors have a role in making this happen? Risk ↔ Courage issue.

### **Session 4: Forestry across the axes – Red Table (there were only 2 discussion groups for this final session)**

- Need to think about the next programme (post 2013)
  - How will we manage the funding – make it a smooth process?
  - What do we fund?
- Registering land - important
- Take into account who gets involved at what level; try and make it as easy as possible
  - Local level theme for the priorities and national level theme for the system
- LAGs given forestry objectives and Woodfuel e.g. Making it Local / NW LAG
- LA officers talking about forestry when talking about HLS (Northumberland NPA)

- Message for the future is if you see an opportunity push for it as farmers can access SFP and EWGS – need to raise awareness
- Think in an integrated way between Pillar I and II and longer term trajectory
- Landscape scale operation / delivery must be integrated i.e. include social dimension and local community and training to help people understand opportunities and use of landscape (i.e. public goods)
- Northumberland – different aspects working together; forestry and landscape. Also need to get land managers to share and co-operate
- Need for RDPE to control and conserve – e.g. of achieving this in E of E (Jilly Hall to share info)
- Role for campaign for the Farmed Environment?

### **Key Points:**

- 1) Need to start thinking about the next programme now
  - Especially process and governance
  - Need to start evidence now
- 2) Public goods (i.e. benefits provided by landscape) are not isolated; we have got to include the social dimension
- 3) Importance of local authorities getting their woodlands registered. Linked to point 1 above re future processes.

### **Session 4: Forestry across the axes – Blue Table (there were only 2 discussion groups for this final session)**

- Dialogue to stimulate debate between local authorities and the Forestry Commission (FC)
- More joined up thinking across counties
- Good support from FC when applying for grants and pre-checks
- FC not always good at engagement with other partners
- Using woodland to promote green gyms, green schools
- Resources to do more joined up thinking
- Focus of use of RDPE using money in Coventry
- FC operates on a smaller scale than NE
- Engagement happens but it does not go anywhere
- Engagement through intermediaries
- Finding new opportunities – new markets for woodland waste products
- Joined up national programmes – carbon reduction
- Use of woodland forums to help engagement
- Regional strategies / historical issues – arable farmers don't like trees
- Environmental aspects – carbon sinks.

**Key Points:**

- 1) Forestry Commission is good at a local level but not so good at strategic engagement – partially fault of local authorities, LAGs and others
- 2) Understanding the context of woodland at a local authority level
- 3) Is forestry a “blind spot” for some local authorities?