

“Environmental Sustainability”

Minutes

Attendees

John Barker	John Giles	Daisy Martlew
Laura Beardsell-Moore	Jim Gledhill	Corinne Meakins
John Buchanan	Anne Marie Hamilton	Roger Moore
John Carrick	Suzanne Harris	Julie Nelson
Rachel Carrington	Brian Hayes	John Pennell
Gareth Dalglish	Jeremy Hill	Stuart Pile
Keith Davis	Pat Holtom	Hazel Williams
Alex Dinsdale	Jasmine Joolia	
Rosemary Farmer	Mags Lambert	

Apologies

Frances Bedding	Philip Hayes	Chris Tombs
Kirsten Bennett	Louise Hobbs	Philip Wilson
Martin Collison	Greg Luton	Sarah Wilson
Nicola Currie	Sandra Mitcham	David Wood
Philip Eden	David Morgan	Richard Woolley
Alex Francis	Nick Phillips	Chris Tombs
John Goodwin	Sandy Shattock	

Speakers

John Giles, Environment Agency
Gareth Dalglish, Natural England
Corinne Meakin, Forestry Commission
Rachel Carrington, National Farmers Union
Alex Dinsdale, National Farmers Union
Jeremy Hill, CPRE

1. Welcome – Pat Holtom

Pat welcomed everyone to the meeting and formally thanked David Wood, who has taken voluntary redundancy, for his hard work and support of the Forum since its inception. She introduced Mags Lambert and Jasmine Joolia of Rural Action East who are taking over the secretariat role. We had enough funding to see us through to the financial year end in March but thereafter the Forum would need to find funding.

2. News & Updates

Pat told the Forum that we had heard nothing from Defra following our submission of a joint bid with the Food and Agriculture Board (FAB) to form a Rural and Farming Network. If we are successful, the form of the Forum will change and the Terms of Reference will require updating.

There would be separate meetings for the EERF and FAB and joint meetings occasionally to get ideas to take to Defra Minister so it could be a very influential body. Pat asked if anyone has contacts who may be keen to support or contribute and appropriate for the Network to let her know. John Barker asked if the Members' list could be circulated and we will do this should we win the bid for the Network.

3. Environmental Issues for Rural Areas in the East of England

John Giles – the Environment Agency then took the floor to present on the top challenges and developments in environmental issues in rural areas.

The Environment Agency's priorities are mainly flooding, coastal erosion, water resources and quality and then climate change and how that affects us. The East of England receives a quarter of the national budget to deal with the problems with water and flooding and this area also has a third of the best croplands which are at risk from flooding. Other issues that have to be considered in the event of flooding are the infrastructure problems that would arise from heavy rainfall – treatment works, electricity, emergency service access, etc Coastal erosion is also a major problem with our coastline being the fastest eroding in Europe and the habitats that are vanishing as a result. We need to look at innovative ways to protect this habitat. Water availability needs to be looked at too as half of the region currently being in drought status and as nearly 60% of water suppliers are over licenced due to new housing developments etc. There is a Water Framework Directive in place but only 18% of water bodies are in good status and this must be improved. If the standards set in the Water Framework Directive are not met, the organisation will be fined.

The Natural Environment White Paper was launched on 7 June 2011 states putting nature and ecosystems at the heart of decision making. The Environment Agency will provide advice and support to organisations under their climate change adaptation programme and Sustainability East will be given funding to continue.

4. Considering the Natural Environment and Resources

Gareth Dalglish of Natural England told the Forum that a report on the natural environment was produced in 2009 that lists nine priority areas and actions. The objective was to achieve growth in ways which protect and enhance the natural environment. A lot of work is done as a result of policy but with all the changes and the Localism Bill imminent, the emphasis has changed. With the introduction of LEPs, Gareth said they now need to influence them on the importance of the natural environment.

The newly formed Nature Improvement Areas are able to bid on a share of a £7.5 million funding pot. There are currently 20 of them and only 12 will be approved and the share of the pot will be spread over three years. Gareth also told the Forum about Biodiversity 2020 which is a Defra strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. For the first time too, Natural England are involved in Marine Protected Areas for the 127 Marine Conservation Zones and have consulted stakeholder groups, fishermen and other interested parties. Public consultation will be sought at some point in the future.

5. Environmental Challenges for Trees and Woodlands

Corinne Meakins explained to the Forum the challenges the Forestry Commission is facing with pests and diseases attacking trees, the impact of lack of rainfall and climate change, the advantage of implementing planning systems, managing threats such as deer, economic viability and expansion of woodlands.

6. Sustainable Intensification

Rachel Carrington of NFU discussed the pressures the area will be under with the predicted

world population of 9 billion by 2050 and the inevitable demand on food production and the greater demand for water and energy that follows. There will be a need to produce more food on the right sort of land to meet this demand. Farmers have to respond to many policy demands as well as having the dilemma of producing more food on small amounts of land and therefore Research and Development is a very important agenda item.

Alex Dinsdale of NFU explained about the various schemes farmers are paid to undertake environmental improvements above and beyond the basic requirements and Environmental Stewardship Schemes will replace the ESA and CSS Schemes. The Campaign for the Farmed Environment was set up two years ago and its aims are to encourage farmers into Environmental Stewardship. He discussed other important factors such as the availability and quality of water, renewable energy, diversification, scale and adaptation and how important these are becoming in farming. Soil quality should perhaps have more focus than it currently does as it will aid cultivation, improve drainage and prevent water pollution.

7. Combining Environmental Sustainability with Economic Success

Jeremy Hill of CPRE discussed whether we could actually afford to be greener and he discussed planning, farming, food and the wider environment. Jeremy felt making economic growth a more important factor than the environment was concerning; for example, why build houses that you cannot sell as people cannot get mortgages?

8. Question and Answer Panel

The speakers formed a panel to answer a variety of diverse questions asked by members covering topics such as the makeup of Local Nature Partnerships, Community Infrastructure Levy, high level stewardship versus focus on beef production and the pressures that the natural environment in the area is under. A number of these issues concerned the Localism Bill and the Forum will seek to address them in future meetings.

Pat thanked the NFU for the use of the conference room and asked everyone to look out for news about the new Rural Network which would be circulated to members as soon as news was received.

The next meeting will be held on **18 January 2012** on the topic of **Localism**. The venue is Hylands House, Chelmsford.

Close of Meeting