

West of England Partnership
24 October 2008

Rural Strategy: Consultation draft

Purpose

1. This report aims to inform members of the recent work of the Rural Strategy Group to produce the consultation draft of a revised rural strategy, to ask members to approve this for consultation and to ask members to note the proposed focus for the Group.

Background

2. The Rural Strategy Group consists of members and officers of the three authorities which include substantial rural areas, together with representatives other organisations providing a service to rural organisations, eg Avon Local Councils Association, or represent rural interests, eg NFU. Bristol is kept informed of developments in recognition of its importance as a market for rural produce.
3. The Group was set up because, despite the rurality of much of the sub-region and the need for a different approach to tackling issues in rural areas, rural interests have tended to be overlooked. The Group meets quarterly.
4. The Rural Strategy Group decided in April 2007 that the Rural Strategy should be updated. By providing a framework for activity, a Strategy was thought to be useful for a range of organisations operating in the sub-regions' rural areas. The previous Strategy had been developed in late 2003, pre-dated the Government's Rural Strategy and the West of England Partnership and was a lengthy document (61 pages).
5. The Group felt that a more strategic document was required. Since then there has been much discussion within the Group, including two workshops, resulting in the attached Draft Strategy. It has been suggested that a number of organisations operating within the West of England rural may find the Strategy useful, particularly if they are applying for funding.

The Revised Strategy

6. The proposed Consultation Draft of the Strategy (attached in Appendix 1) is based on a rural version of the West of England 2026 vision:

A rural vision for 2026:

- **A rising quality of life** for all, with healthy lifestyles, access to better quality healthcare, affordable housing of all types and the development of sustainable communities
- **A prosperous rural area** with a buoyant economy where the gap has been closed between disadvantaged and other communities
- **Sustainable communities** including easier travel, thanks to transport solutions that link communities to employment opportunities, local services and cultural attractions, and the control of and reduction in congestion

7. It identifies actions which might be carried out to support achievement of each of the three aspects of the proposed rural vision. These were identified as part of a workshop exercise and are not intended as confirmed actions or a full list. The actions suggested would require the contributions of a range of organisations.

Consultation

8. It is proposed that consultation takes place over the next 3 months (closing date 31 January 2009), allowing a final draft to be brought to the Partnership Board meeting for approval on 12 March. Consultation will be:
- By sending the draft strategy to the organisations identified by the Rural Strategy Group membership
 - Through the WEP website.

Role of Rural Strategy Group

9. The Strategy recognises that many organisations will contribute to achieving the Rural Vision. It identifies the role of the group as to:
- a) **promote an integrated city region, which will help to underpin the success of its rural areas:** The urban areas are seen as an opportunity for the rural community and links between the two need to be fostered.
 - b) **help to maximise opportunities for accessing funding:** The Rural Strategy Group will do this through a continuing dialogue with SWRDA and other organisations
 - c) **provide an integrated approach with its other groups:** The Rural Strategy Group will work more closely with other West of England Partnership groups. It will do this by:
 - Briefing group members on cross-cutting issues

- Inviting key members to RSG meetings to discuss particular issues and develop a joint approach
- d) **ensure that rural issues are recognised in the delivery of the growth agenda** by engaging with the development of the Delivery Plan and subsequent planning
 - e) **ensure that opportunities to promote the rural strategy are translated into action where there is benefit by doing so**
 - f) **ensure that people with local knowledge, particularly in relation to the countryside, are consulted and in touch with decision-makers;** for example, through parish/village planning. This strategy has taken account of an analysis of issues raised through town and parish planning. The Rural Strategy Group would support strengthening (eg through more Quality Parishes) the work of town and parish councils and extending the work to new areas. Additional ways need to be found to reach less vocal areas.
 - g) **ensure that action is taken to address appropriate economic growth of the market towns** (Chipping Sodbury, Clevedon, Keynsham, Nailsea, Norton-Radstock, Portishead, Thornbury and Yate)
 - h) **ensure that the needs of particular groups (eg young people, older people and Black & minority ethnic groups) are identified and taken account of in delivering the strategy.**

Recommendation:

That the Partnership –

- i. Approve the attached consultation draft
- ii. Note the proposed future focus of the Rural Strategy Group.

Appendix 1: Rural Strategy 2008: Consultation draft

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