

**SELEP Rural Sector Working Group (RSWG)**

#### Tuesday 08 October 2019

#### 10.30 – 13.00

The West Barn, High House Production Park, Vellacott Close, Purfleet,

Essex RM19 1RJ

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1. **Welcome and introductions** – Graham Peters (Chair)

Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and the minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Apologies were noted.

1. **Sector Support Fund projects update** – Stephanie Durling, Manager, Produced in Kent (Good Food Growth Campaign) and Don Cranfield, Plumpton College (Skills and Training)

Good Food Growth Campaign

**The progress report for the project will be circulated with the minutes.**

The project focuses on ten events to support local food and drink producers. These include consultation and networking events, training workshops and meet the buyer events. This will be followed by a pan-regional conference.

Contact has been made with many businesses through the project and a database of those involved is being built up.

The events held to date have been well attended – the list of businesses that attended events is included in the progress report.

Meet the buyer events are being planned for early 2020.

The group thanked Stephanie for her work on this project and noted that this is an example of Sector Support Funding projects making a difference.

The dates for future meetings are included in the progress report.

Skills and Training

The completion date for the project has been put back to the 31st August 2020 due to delays and linked to the decision related to Hadlow College.

Everyone was urged to be involved in the consultation process. Businesses currently lack skills in business management and feel isolated and this project is aiming to address part of this issue.

A lot of rural businesses are also not aware of the support currently available.

It was suggested that this be linked up to the NFU as there is a lot of knowledge exchange already occurring in terms of training and business needs.

1. **EAFRD Programme underspend update** – Stuart Gibbons, SELEP Rural Consultant

Stuart Gibbons informed the group that there is £35-40 million underspend from the EAFRD programme.

There is still the aim to launch a national programme by the end of October/ early November. This will be a national call with a focus on food processing, rural tourism and business development.

Spend has to be committed by December 2020 and be out of the door by March 2022.

The Expressions of Interest window is expected to be quite short – and could perhaps close by the end of January.

There is still optimism that this money will come out and LEPs should promote this opportunity.

1. **Rural Tourism Task and Finish Group update** – Alex Riley, SELEP Programme Manager

Alex Riley updated the group on the Rural Tourism task and finish group meeting and noted that its primary focus was on the recent publication of the Tourism Sector Deal – particularly the opportunity to create five Tourism Zones nationally.

We are currently exploring the potential opportunity of the creation of a SELEP-wide Tourism Zone. Government are unclear on the specificities of the offer and more information will likely come forward at the end of this calendar year. Any group that takes this forward will have wide representation across the geography and associated sectors.

The group noted that Kent food trails as well as the coastal path should be included as part of this discussion.

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1. **Rural Housing Task and Finish Group update** – Brian Horton, SELEP Housing Consultant

Brian Horton updated the group on the outputs from the Rural Housing task and finish group.

It was noted that there is a refreshed housing protocol for Kent. The group is seeking to produce a short position statement for the three counties and the Kent protocol can be used to engage with Kent from a wider perspective and other counties via the developer’s groups and housing officers groups.

A conference call will be held in due course to address these actions and identify any follow-up work.

1. **Local Industrial Strategy Workshop** – Sharon Spicer, SELEP Strategy & Intelligence Manager

Sharon Spicer gave a presentation on the Local Industrial Strategy and requested feedback from the group on some key questions. The headlines from this engagement session as noted below:

* There needs to be a better understanding of clusters and making businesses world leaders.
* Agri-tech is a massive opportunity in terms of increasing productivity.
* There is potentially a piece of work to be done to understand the scale of the opportunity in rural.
* There is a cultural element that is key to productivity in terms of links with universities/research institutions and businesses.
* An inclusive growth approach should be taken.
* In terms of infrastructure, the investment should focus on enabling participation in the economy.
* Smart village initiative.
* Investments should be made in knowledge transfer, information exchange and where the market isn’t going to work.
* There should be a greater focus on micro-businesses.
* In terms of incentivizing scale-ups, many businesses won’t step over the VAT threshold.
* Small businesses are the bedrock of the rural economy and this must be recognized.
* Attention should be paid to small businesses and how advice could be provided to them from real people.
* UKSPF could be used to replace some of the good work that the LEADER programme funded.
* Healthy ageing in rural areas is an opportunity.
* Anglia Ruskin have a group looking at the ageing society that should be engaged with.
* The carbon neutral challenge is central to the rural economy.
* Encourage communities to have their own power generation methods.
* Working from home in rural areas should be encouraged.
* Flood resilience and climate change.
1. **AOB**

The Social Enterprise Prospectus will be brought to the next Rural Working Group meeting.

The group should note The Future of Food event being held at Writtle University College on the 24th October.

1. **Date and venue for next meeting** – TBC