

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

#### Tuesday 28th January 2020

#### 10.30 – 12:30

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.

1. **LIS Updates – Alex Riley**

Alex Riley delivered a presentation to the group on the Local Industrial Strategy. Updating the group on the progress to date and noting where the rural sector has been included in the current draft document.

The group made a number of comments, including:

* The new communities need to relate to the surrounding communities, particularly rural areas.
* The ‘coastal catalyst’ priority also encompasses much of the rural agenda but that is not clear from the designated name of the priority. There was some suggestion this could be substituted for a priority focused around ‘levelling-up left behind areas.
* Don’t use the term low skills, particularly when it comes to the agricultural sector.
* Medway cultural city bid could be referenced.
* There are a number of key areas in the rural economy that can support the wider productivity agenda; such as horticulture, food security, agri-tech, the environment.
* NIAB and Plumpton should be case studies – this is referred to in the presentation, but the group re-affirmed this.
* Note that without the South East as a successful gateway economy, the whole UK economy suffers.

1. **RDPE/EAFRD Programme Update - Alex Riley**

Alex Riley noted the progress to date on the RDPE Growth Programme. There have been a good number of submissions from the South East thus far, but as this is a national call, the group was encouraged to continue making their wider networks aware of this funding opportunity.

The deadline for Expressions of Interest is Sunday 16th February 2020. Further information can be found here: <https://www.southeastlep.com/opportunities/rdpe-growth-programme/>

1. **Sector Support Fund Projects**

Good Food Growth Campaign – Stuart Gibbons

It was noted that the project maintained good progress, with a meet the buyer event planned for the 3rd February.

A pan-LEP conference is planned for the 17th March and working group members were encouraged to make their networks aware of this. It was noted that hotels should be invited to these events as they are potential buyers.

Skills and Training – Dave Stokes

The project is making good progress and is still working to the planned deadline. Plumpton have hired the individual working on the project from Hadlow College on a part-time basis to continue the good work that has been undertaken thus far.

1. **Forward Planning for 2020 – Graham Peters**

Rural Strategy

The group agreed that the current Rural Strategy has been a positive document that has been helpful in acting as a focal point and a strategic framework for the rural economy in the South East/

It has been useful for strategic engagement and it was agreed that something similar was needed moving forward, conscious of the fact that the time frame of the current Rural Strategy only runs to 2021.

The group noted that a strategy/prospectus would allows the group to put a rural spin and nuance in terms of LIS implementation and the next iteration needs to be underpinned by fundamental data.

The work that Coast to Capital LEP have done on rural data was noted and the group agreed that a similar piece of work for the SELEP geography would be a useful starting point. It was also noted that there was evidence from the outputs of the LEADER programme that could be included in the evidence base.

It was noted that Essex are refreshing their rural strategy and that this process could dovetail into any refresh of the SELEP rural strategy.

It was agreed that the process should begin in terms of the refresh or creation of a new Rural Strategy for SELEP. The first step in the process before taking an ask from the working group to the SELEP Strategic Board would be to update the evidence base.

**Action: Make suggestions in terms of the type of data and statistics that should be collected and send to Alex Riley – ALL.**

1. **Cross-Sector Working Group – Alex Riley**

Alex noted that there is going to be a more formal process in terms of cross-working group collaboration. This will include a quarterly written update of the key activity within each working group as well as a quarterly call for working group chairs to help coordinate activity and collaboration on areas of shared priority and interest.

1. **AOB**

The progress in terms of the Gourmet Garden Trails project was noted, with a widening out of focus to the US consumer as well as the Dutch consumer. £37k match funding is required. The project addresses many issues around productivity and seasonality, with workshops underway.