

**RR Project Managers Meeting
Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall
25th September 2007**

Present: Paul Chadwick (Rural Renaissance); Chris Langford (Rural Renaissance); Mandie Berry (Rural Renaissance); Caroline Rigby (Rural Renaissance); Pat Gubbins (New Horizons – West Somerset Community College); Katherine Armstrong (Hidden Somerset/Broadspaces); Dave Cornish (Connecting Rural Somerset/Broadplaces); Jean-Baptiste Siboulet (Somerset County Council - Student placement from Vendee); Gerard Tucker (SRBSS); Anne Bird (Creative Business BOOST); Terry Clay (West Mendip Opportunities); Tracy Hill (Creative Business BOOST); John Stow (Somerset Rural Youth Project); Rachel Smith (Hidden Somerset/Broadplaces); Diane Bassett (Wimbleball – adding value to Exmoor); Jane Wilson (Somerset Market Towns – Building the Network); Lindy Booth (ViSTA – Recruitment Hub); Jan Ross (CLOWNS); John Harris (Wiveliscombe – Building Links); David Froome (Seavington Community Shop project); Pauline Dagnall (Somerset Food Links – Food Sector Support Service);

1. Apologies: Corinne Matthews, Nitin Sharma, Andrew Moore, James Platts, Hattie Winter, Liz Byrne, Sue Place, Jo Hoare, Gerald Swayne, Peter Menneer, Julian Mellor, Angela Kerr, Vernon Robinson.

2. Scheme Overview

- PC outlined the main strands of the Rural Renaissance programme for the benefit of new projects: the Main programme (£1.75 m) running 05-08 incorporating 21 projects under 4 strategic themes; the Workspace programme (£400K) with 11-12 projects expected by March 08 covering either feasibility studies or actual building works (eg business units) leading to new jobs; the Somerset Access to Services Programme (SATS) – started Jan 07 with £515K allocated to 26 projects including village shops, improvements to community venues, delivery of training & advice, improved access to IT facilities.
- The success of the programme as a whole is determined by two factors: firstly, the level of spend according to the timetable agreed by the RDA - Somerset is performing well in the region compared to other Rural Renaissance programmes (currently 2nd); secondly, the outputs achieved are a significant measure of the success of the scheme in terms of regeneration, and are to be achieved finally by March 09 according to each project's M&E Plan. Therefore projects will need to continue to collect evidence of outputs beyond the end of the scheme in March 08 and report these to Rural Renaissance to inform our report to SWRDA.
- Well-run partnerships that keep to targets are an important determinant for the RDA in considering future programmes.

3. Claims Process – feedback & update

- Projects appeared to have engaged well with the new paperwork for the reporting and claims process. Q2 claims forms have now been sent. No problems with the process. Projects were urged to contact their relevant projects officer before submitting their claim to ensure

that it was completed correctly and all evidence submitted – this saves chasing later on.

- There was some slippage with the total Q1 claim to SWRDA which did not reach the target spend profile. This was partly due to the delay in SCC issuing contracts to projects, arising from a delay by SWRDA in issuing their contract to Somerset County Council. AB said that BOOST's claim was lower due to the claims deadline now being 3 days shorter – but it was pointed out that the quarter itself remained the same length and there was pressure on projects to complete their total spend by the deadline of March 08. In particular there was no leeway with SATS projects beyond March 08 as this funding stream came from DEFRA.
- KA raised again the issue of claiming salaries one month in arrears and how this affects the claims especially at the year end (**Paul** to investigate)
- There are still some aspects of audit requirements that need clarification from the RDA in relation to the accountable bodies (ie Somerset County Council) notably around proof of defrayal. As a result of meetings between SCC and SWRDA it may soon be possible to speed up payments to projects, following receipt of a correct and adequately evidenced claim at the quarter end.

4. Outputs

- PC outlined the main programme output definitions which have proved challenging. He emphasised the importance of properly evidencing the outputs. The SWRDA document has been provided to all projects but can be made available again if required.
- In particular output 4a is causing problems. The strict definition has now been relaxed so that the RDA will now accept as part of this output occasions where business come together formally to share good practice and ideas. PC emphasised the importance of case studies. Re output 6: on-line learning could be counted provided there was evidence that 6 hours actual learning had taken place (number of “hits” to a site would be insufficient).
- Data protection was again raised as an issue regarding evidence. PC recommended that provided the basic information was supplied to Rural Renaissance and summarised, we would only require a sample of a few case studies as detailed examples. However it is vital that projects collect and retain all the detailed information on individual beneficiaries which could be asked for by SWRDA at short notice. It was noted that in future programmes projects should be given details of the evidence requirements from the outset so that project beneficiaries could be asked for the appropriate consent. PC suggested that a clause would need to be added to the contract in future programmes so that data protection would not be an issue. For access to services outputs names & addresses are not needed but a simple measure of usage that could be evidenced.
- Projects were asked to reflect on the level of outputs profiled in their M&E plan as part of their contract – are these still achievable? Any foreseen reductions need to be discussed with RR staff, as each

project contributes to the total scheme outputs target agreed with the RDA. Exceeding our targets contributes to the programmes overall success.

- There is potential for some cross project collaboration in relation to achieving outputs. For example group discussions revealed that some projects are set up to run courses with insufficient participants that could be filled by those on other projects needing training, provided this did not compromise the main aims of the project. This is particularly significant with specialist courses eg IT skills.

5. Final evaluation of projects

- Evaluation of individual projects should be commensurate with the scale of the project: some large RR projects are employing independent consultants. For smaller projects reporting on the form provided would be sufficient, with the length of the report depending on the scale of the investment. CR had sent out draft copies of the final evaluation report form with accompanying guidance notes & feedback on these was requested. **(All)**.
- Time-scale – all projects to complete their report by March 08. Projects that have finished and with no outputs or business growth to report on during 07-08 can submit theirs earlier.
- SWRDA are about to embark on evaluation of the Rural Renaissance programme region-wide, looking at processes and outputs, which will entail meetings with scheme managers & visits to selected projects.

6. Annual Review Meeting 14th November, Barrington Court.

- This important meeting provides an opportunity to inform the agencies that comprise the RR Board, about the lessons learnt from running the programme. It is envisaged that 2-3 projects would collaborate and report on projects falling under each of the strategic themes, outlining for example project successes, barriers and the future.
- *It is important that projects keep this date free so that they can be represented if required.*

7. Project Training Requirements

- CR had requested to be notified if any project managers had training requirements but had little response. Topics suggested were – a repeat of the evaluation workshop, business planning, sustainable funding. Please get in touch if you would like us to put on any of these or other courses. **(All)**.

8. Publicity

- Projects were thanked for the information & images provided so far for the website which was anticipated to be updated by early November. Some projects had still to provide information **(CR to notify)**
- The scheme also intends to produce a summary leaflet or documents covering the project achievements, at the same time.

9. The future

- SWRDA has indicated that there will be funds for rural regeneration beyond March 2008 but as yet we do not know the scale. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review there will be an announcement shortly re SWRDA funding. They favour the Rural Renaissance partnership approach and would like to build on the experience developed in each county.
- There is likely to be closer alignment in future with the Local Area Agreement for each county notably the strategic economic objectives – but in Somerset this may not be finalised until March 08.
- RDA will be looking for strategic fit with their regional economic objectives and will be looking for clear links to these.
 - 08-09 is likely to be a transitional year for RDA funding schemes with possible funding to be negotiated with each county – possibly leaving only 2 years for a full funding programme.
 - For future funding programmes, SWRDA is thinking about the possibility of commissioning future activities & projects to fulfil their objectives.
 - The Access to Services programme will not be continued as it stands but projects which demonstrate clear economic benefit (in addition to social and environmental) may be considered under future programmes. Other smaller projects will be able to bid for funds through the new LEADER+ programme (to be run by SWRDA) which subject to successful bids could be established in 2008/09 in parts of Somerset.
 - The separate RDA Market Towns funding pot is coming to an end in March 2008 and projects seeking funds to benefit the market towns will need to be considered through the successor programme to RR, but again the emphasis will be on economic benefits.

10. New initiatives & ideas – feedback from groups

- Is there any longer a definite need for a business advice project for the agricultural sector or should there in future be a project integrating the whole rural economy & land-based sector? It was also appreciated that there was pressure from Central Govt to reduce the number of specialist advice agencies so we would need to think hard about how such services would be provided.
- The need for better networking between project managers to facilitate cross project collaboration & sharing of ideas & expertise.
- Much scope for future sustainability projects in rural areas reducing the carbon footprint & the need to travel whereby villages could become vibrant community hubs and for example IT facilities & usage could be maximised to expand on-line ordering & bulk deliveries to villages.
- There is a continuing need for skills & training for individuals at all levels of education – not just those below level 2.
- If more jobs are to be generated in rural areas as part of regeneration programmes, accommodation & the cost of rural housing is likely to become an even greater issue which needs be addressed at the same time