

**Sevenoaks District Rural Forum Minutes
Wednesday 2nd February 2005
Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre**

<p>Present</p> <p>Cllr Spence (SDC), Cllr Mrs Davison (SDC), Cllr Mrs Gee (SDC), Vivienne Boucher (Manifold Associates), Susan Pittman (CPRE), Nigel Britten (CPRE), Mary Innis (KAPC), Ian Scott (Penshurst Place), Bill Gillibrand (Long Distance Walkers Association), Nigel Whitburn (Action With Communities in Rural Kent), Mike Cook (BTCV), James Hadden (Knole Estate), Tim Owen (Kent Downs AONB), John Bovington (Kent Downs AONB), Rick Bayne (North West Kent Countryside Partnership), Alan Tuckwell (British Horse Society), Mike Westphal (Sustrans), Debi Rice (SCD), Ian Bailey (SDC), Alex Melling (SDC).</p>	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Cllr Coates (SDC), Cllr Mrs Cook (SDC), Janine Allen (SDC), Gary Connor (SDC), Crispin Davies (Action With Communities In Rural Kent), Steven Gleave (KCC), Sean Hanna (English Nature), Dr Jennifer James (LPVC), Jean Morgan (SDC), Richard Moyse (Wildlife Trust), Alison Thompson (The Rural Housing Trust), John Warde (The Estate Office), Trevor White (Outridge Cottage), Maggie Williams (SDC), Victoria Lawson (Action With Communities In Rural Kent), John Keates (KAPC), Casper Johnson (KCC Environmental Unit), Maureen Boustread, Len Schwaiger (Countryside Alliance)</p>
<p>1. Welcome</p> <p>Cllr. Spence welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>	
<p>2. Apologies</p> <p>As above.</p>	
<p>3. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising</p> <p>Item 3 - Susan Pittman requested that the minutes from the previous meeting be amended to reflect the fact that she had suggested that an article be written for 'In-Shape' to raise the profile and advertise existence of the Rural Forum. Cllr. Spence agreed to write an article for the July edition of 'In-Shape'.</p> <p>Item 6 – Cllr. Spence mentioned that a Rural Forum web page has been created and is currently accessible via the Council's web site. The web page will contain agendas, minutes and any additional papers as well as providing a link to the Forum's e-mail address, rural.forum@sevenoaks.gov.uk. Any queries can be sent to this address and will be dealt with by a Council Officer. In addition, the address will also act as a useful tool in collecting responses and views on various documents and policies, providing an opportunity for the Forum to become more proactive.</p> <p>Cllr. Spence also noted that inviting a local policeman accountable for policing rural areas to the next forum meeting was being looked into.</p> <p>Susan Pittman informed the Forum that the Public Awareness and Education group was to run a course for the general public. However, following the impending closure of Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre, another venue must be found. Susan also highlighted that the course required endorsement from the</p>	
<p>Cllr. Spence</p> <p>SDC Officers</p>	

<p>Council and that the Public Awareness and Education group required Officer and/or Member time. Cllr. Spence agreed to look into this. Susan added that the Group was saddened by the news of the closure of LPVC.</p>	<p>Cllr. Spence</p>
<p>4. Rural Training, Professional Accreditation, and Benchmarking Programmes (Vivienne Boucher, Manifold Association)</p> <p>Vivienne Boucher introduced herself to the Forum and explained her role within Welcome E-Learning. She explained that the aim of the programme, led by Tourism South East with funding from the European Social Fund and co-financed through the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), was to provide 3 year, free support for rural businesses in the form of blended learning programmes which offer the flexibility of being able to learn from home, on-line or in the classroom.</p> <p>She outlined the criteria for eligibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The business must be located in a rural area • It must employ less than 250 staff • Turnover must be less than £26.8 million a year. <p>She also mentioned that there was an opportunity to gain an E-Skills passport, via on line questions that aimed to assess I.T skills, in addition to academic qualifications.</p> <p>The question was raised as to what tier of employee the courses were aimed at. Vivienne stated that these were primarily for management and supervisors however, she stated that the training courses are available on a commercial basis for those businesses and/or staff that were not eligible.</p> <p>Finally, Vivienne mentioned that any businesses interested should make an appointment with her to discuss their eligibility.</p> <p>Cllr. Spence thanked Vivienne.</p>	
<p>5. Sevenoaks District Community Safety Strategy (Lesley Bowles, SDC)</p> <p>Lesley Bowles thanked the Forum for inviting her. She explained that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 required District Councils to audit crime. The Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership meets on a quarterly basis to fulfil this role and encourage the community to reduce crime. Leslie wished for the Forum to comment on the consultation draft of the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan 2005-8 which is based on a crime and disorder audit of the District carried out in 2004.</p> <p>The audit found that crime rates in Sevenoaks compared to Kent, the South East and the UK as a whole were relatively low. In terms of fear of crime, Lesley noted that 74% of those surveyed felt safe whilst 85% felt safe in neighbourhoods and 70% felt safe in local town centres. However, crime rates have increased by 0.7% in the District yet this again is relatively low when compared to a 3% increase Kent-wide and an increase of 8% nationally.</p> <p>The audit also identified four areas of higher crime rates namely Edenbridge, Sevenoaks, New Ash Green and Swanley. Rural areas were examined although Lesley explained that crime rates tended to change considerably over time thus in</p>	

response, temporary priority neighbourhoods are to be established in partnership with local people and the parish councils.

The audit also dealt with crime type and identified that criminal damage was the most feared form of crime with the greatest incidence also. This was followed by anti-social behaviour, burglary, drug abuse, vehicle crime and alcohol abuse. The Partnership also identifies prolific offenders and a system is now in place to find those who are re-offending and those who may offend. The Power Project is one such example.

Lesley noted that people want a reassuring uniformed presence either in the form of community wardens or police officers. She highlighted that the number of community wardens, designated to a parish, was now increasing and that good feedback was being generated.

Lesley explained that Anti-Social Behaviour is not a crime as such, yet there had been five Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued in the District so far. A number of agencies now meet on a monthly basis to find ways of dealing with these people. She also mentioned that fly tipping was considered to be a major anti-social behaviour in rural areas. The District Council is pulling resources with other Councils to prosecute and to give publicity to deter offenders with a direct link to the DVLA to find car owner details quickly. Officers, the fire brigade and other agencies are all being asked to report incidences of fly tipping. Evidence bags are being given to Officers to be used for prosecution purposes.

Lesley informed the Forum that the next phase for the Partnership was to produce an action plan. She outlined that the key aims surrounded creating safer environments, reducing fear of crime, improving access to local agencies, providing good information about crime and strengthening community involvement. Lesley asked the Forum to comment on the draft Strategy and Action Plan, the deadline for which is Wednesday 16th February 2005, via the Council's website or by completing a comments form.

Nigel Britten questioned whether a similar percentage of people in rural areas feel safe when compared to urban areas. Lesley explained that there was a distinct geographical trend in that, the further north in the District the less safe people generally feel whilst people in rural areas generally feel more safe than those in towns.

Questions were also raised regarding fly tipping and who should be responsible for tipping on managed and non-managed land. John Bovington mentioned that he knew who was fly tipping but was unsure as to the process of reporting the offenders. He emphasised that people needed reassuring about confidentiality. Lesley apologised for the confusion and explained that the Council's Contact Centre should be called who would be able to direct any queries appropriately.

Susan Pittman questioned the use of mobile CCTV units to catch and deter offenders. Lesley stated that this is one solution, yet cameras are likely to be vandalised and there is often difficulty in setting up the units.

Ian Scott raised the question of where policing is coming from and why there is no evidence of intelligence-led policing. Lesley explained that community officers could provide a solution to this. Ian also asked whether there were any statistics that refer crime reference numbers to crime report numbers however Lesley was unsure.

<p>Cllr. Spence thanked Ian and stated that the Rural Forum has an important role to play in the progress of the LDF.</p>	
<p>7. A.O.B</p> <p>John Bovington questioned why Lullingstone Park Visitor Centre was making a loss and expressed concerns that there was no longer any focus for the Kent Downs AONB social inclusion project.</p> <p>Cllr. Spence stated that it is not the position of the Forum to comment on the closure of the Visitor Centre.</p> <p>Alan Tuckwell requested that the Forum respond to Kent Council Council's Strategic Policy and Investment Framework and suggested that Tony Atkinson be contacted. Cllr. Spence stated that an Officer would investigate further.</p> <p>Ian Scott suggested that the Forum should be discussing Tourism and other non-statutory items and argued that, through addressing such areas, results can be achieved.</p> <p>Susan Pittman informed the Forum of the World Garden at Lullingstone Castle that is due to be opened in April 2005 and a BBC2 documentary that is to be made regarding this. She suggested that this would have been beneficial to the Visitor Centre. She also congratulated Sevenoaks District Council on resuming the Gardens for Wildlife Scheme.</p>	<p>Alex Melling</p>
<p>8. Date and venue of next meeting</p> <p>Cllr. Spence informed the Forum that the date and venue of the next Rural Forum had yet to be confirmed however, a number of options are being considered including holding the Forum at various venues across the District.</p>	