



West Sussex Rural Forum

Tuesday 2 June 2009 at Ashington Village Hall

Climate Change – Community responses to the issues in West Sussex

Summary of the Forum Discussion and recommendations

Feedback from the breakout groups.

1. Holistic Approaches

A number of good examples of individual initiatives that have come out of holistic approaches (Action Plan, Village Audit etc) – Hassocks, Ferring, Buriton (Hants) . All undertaken by the community but with Parish Council taking a leadership role.

Key Action Points identified:-

- a. Clearer and co-ordinated information on advice and funding. There are a lot of initiatives and this can be confusing for individual communities.
- b. Housing - lobby planning departments for environmentally sustainable housing and ensure that a higher proportion of affordable housing. The latter is already being achieved in some Districts and this needs to be the case across West Sussex.
- c. Engage with the schools. Any holistic approach should include local schools. There is the Engage initiative (<http://wsgfl.westsussex.gov.uk> and follow the links through 'in your community) which is currently working with over 178 schools. Schools are enthusiastic, need to be involved with their local communities and also young people are both engaged with the issues and can help engage their parents in the issue. John Hoyland of Engage – 'absolutely vital to 'infect kids' with good principles of sustainability'.

2. Energy Saving / Fuel Poverty

There is scope within community buildings to reduce energy consumption. This needs consistent and strong messages within those buildings to remind people.

Key Action Points identified:-

- a. Priority must be to insulate and generally improve village halls by installing energy saving devices. There are some good examples of retro-fitting as well as new build. (Steyning, Clymping school, Slindon Trust). This is something that all village halls could look at. (Advice and assessment system available from AirS Village Halls Advisers – www.ruralsussex.org.uk).
- b. Regulatory Issues – standard building regulations should require greywater use / water recycling, solar water heating on all newbuilds (houses) but including public buildings / community buildings. Good example of Beechwood Hall, Cooksbridge East Sussex).
The new Energy Performance Certificates are defective as they do not measure full effectiveness.

- c. VAT should be 0% on all building work. There is a disincentive to improve and extend community buildings. For example most Village halls are older buildings that need renovation and modernisation. This type of work incurs VAT at 15% and does mean that it could be cheaper to demolish and rebuild than to renovate. However the 15% is also an additional cost that local groups have to find when fundraising. Changes in the VAT regime could be used to incentivise energy saving work.
- d. Consistent and co-ordinated advice route is needed to ensure that accurate messages reach people. Perhaps a BLOG exchange of ideas could be established to help spread the word. There are inconsistencies in the amount and cost of incentives operated by Local Authorities and this doesn't help. The Energy saving Trust provides grants but these do change and so some way of easily disseminating changing information is needed.

3. **Allotments / community food / local produce**

This group had one clear message – Access to more land for food growing by communities and individuals.

The past few years has seen a surge of interest in community growing and in particular in allotments. In Sussex a recent initial survey by Sussex Associations of Local Councils has identified most parish councils with a waiting list for allotments. Community growing projects of all sorts need to be encouraged to match and meet the demand and enthusiasm for local growing. Sharing of allotment plots should be encouraged locally. Initiatives for those with large gardens to offer them to those who wish to grow (South Harting). There are some good examples of intergenerational work – older people sharing their skills with younger people and families. A lot of scope for more work with schools and this links directly to Engauge. There is already a website set up to help those who have land and those who want land see :- <http://landshare.channel4.com/>

4. **Recycling / Waste Prevention**

Better Tomorrows in West Sussex has been established to help with all waste prevention and recycling initiatives and has a volunteer training and support programme. Very keen to link to Action plans, Parish initiatives and Greening initiatives.

Their website is www.bettertomorrow.org.uk.

The key actions identified:-

- a. Address the issue of community business waste – provide businesses with the solution to their problem by enabling them to group together over recycling or waste reduction. Link into community schemes. This should include care homes, nursing homes, sheltered housing schemes that have waste issues. Engage with FSB or Microbiz to try to promote. Incentivise businesses to recycle by reduced charge for recycling bin collection.
- b. Encourage supermarkets to take responsibility for their recycling, reducing packaging and returning packaging schemes. There are existing schemes in Europe which we should emulate. Example in Henfield of 'No Plastic-Fantastic!' campaign of what can be achieved locally, other examples also with alternative bags etc.
- c. Educate the community about waste prevention – what it is what is available, try to prevent bad practices. Better Tomorrows offer guidance on how to reduce waste, using waste wisely and directly promoting to minority groups or those who aren't reached easily.

Overall conclusions and recommendations for the Rural Partnership to consider.

1. Develop a consistency of message and information within the County. There is a plethora of initiatives, toolkits and processes for communities to engage in climate change and sustainability issues. Yet there is still a confusion of messages. A clear outline of what communities should be doing and what they can do and where help might be available would be useful for all rural communities.
2. Partnerships between the providers of advice should be encouraged. Schools initiatives should link into Parish Action plan or Greening campaign groups and should also involve Better Tomorrows and others to help deliver specific parts of an overall plan. More Joined up thinking between service providers.
3. Lobbying or influencing role on a number of regulatory issues that should be addressed either nationally or locally - VAT, Planning and Building Regulations to ensure increased use of sustainable materials, consistency of implementation of incentives to use less energy or insulate property.
4. Community Energy projects came up as a strong discussion point in one of the workshops and this was also a recommendation from the previous Rural Forum that focused on assisting land-based businesses (wood sector). At the previous Rural Forum it was suggested that the County Council take the initiative in promoting a community heating programme and that Leader or RDPE funding could be used to develop this idea.

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Feedback Comments summary

Participants were asked to provide general comments and to rank the event on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 = not helpful / 5 = extremely useful)

- Excellent – but where do we start? (5)
- Useful meeting – further co-ordination required to see plans turned into action of the group.
- Keep up the good work!
- Organic food should be subsidised by supermarkets and not seen as luxury for the more affluent.
- The meeting showed there is a wealth of experience. Only a small amount came to light. However, it is good to have this opportunity – seems people are listening. Organisation good. (4)
- Very useful although in breakout groups hard to hear in hall with four groups.
- Very good (5)
- Well organised but slightly difficult to hear all speakers. Very good input all round. (5)
- Very stimulating / interesting topic / people. Was hard to hear people in the breakout groups as they were all held in the same room. (4)
- Very useful especially the speaker on the Greening Campaign. (4/5)
- Good speakers – interesting and useful topic which needs to be higher up the Agenda. (4)
- Perhaps a little more time needed for the workshop. Presentations very inspiring. (4)
- Councils should get together to hire a chip wood clipping vehicle to do household collections in the Autumn of tree cuttings. The wood chips could then be sold back at some 50p a bag to householders.
- Well organised, stimulating, practical. Perhaps bit too much speaking – more groups?
- Useful. Main point is that there is no central body to give blanket information on all things of action one can do. (5)
- Well managed event. (4)
- Very useful, particularly for contacts, websites, and sources of information for local projects. Many thanks.
- Location, location, location.
- Have future events near a train station or have a minibus from nearest station or announce local bus route when announcing meeting. (4)
- Central point of all climate change and environmental issues, information in West Sussex. Use coaches to bring people to Forums and charge us. Very good. (5)
- I found the Forum very useful. We need to lead by example. The Petersfield experiment needs implementing across the County with more promotional advertising, for example cash as well as energy savings. Incentives will always help. Rationing of travel particularly air travel would go a long way to cut CO2 emissions. We also need to preserve the fossil fuels we so enjoy for the future. (5)