

DRAFT

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

ENVIRONMENT GROUP

Wednesday 9 October 2002

PRESENT:

Members

Pat Hockey	South Gloucs (in the Chair)
Nolan Clarke	Dartmoor National Park
Julian Johnson	Wilts County Council
Gil Streets	Dorset County Council (pm only)

Officers

Clare Brooke	Head of Strategy
Chris Elton	Director of Policy and Strategy (pm only)
Wendy Lutley	Environment Support Group

Apologies for absence

Malcolm Hanney, Chanel Stevens, Ann Clitheroe, Steven Pugsley, Martin Ross, Sandra Fryer (Chair, Environment Support Group), Claire Gibson (SW RDA).

1. Regional Environmental Strategy

Clare Brooke reported on progress in developing the Regional Environmental Strategy. The workshop on 2 September (to which Environment Group, Environment Support Group and Regional Environmental Network had been invited) was very successful, with a large turnout, and a range of issues and priorities discussed. The report of the workshop is currently being pulled together and will be circulated to all those invited to the workshop.

Members were asked to note the changes to the timetable for future work outlined in section 6.1 of Paper A. The date for finalisation of the Strategy has been moved to the July 2003 Regional Assembly, to allow for a meaningful period of consultation during March and April. Members supported this, and asked that the March 2003 Regional Assembly was used as an opportunity for issues in the Regional Environmental Strategy to be debated amongst Assembly Members.

Action: Assembly Secretariat to propose a debate on the Regional Environmental Strategy at the Regional Assembly in March 2003

2. **Integrated Regional Strategy**

Clare Brooke reported on progress with the Integrated Regional Strategy, and invited comments on the consultants report from Cooper Simms Associates (circulated as an annex to paper B), and advice in relation to next steps. The papers that were circulated prior to the meeting had omitted a letter sent out with the report, which explained its role and next steps, so this was circulated to Members.

Discussions on the Cooper Simms report raised concern over the approach taken to the 'yardstick issues' in that they seemed to be presented as problems, and that the assumptions behind the report needed to be challenged. This was something that will be reflected in future work, and the proposal to undertake further baseline analysis should meet this concern. It was reported that similar concerns had been raised at the Environment Support Group, and that changes to the final report had been made in the light of this, and also the letter that went out with the report explaining its role and the next steps, had been drafted to respond to these issues.

The report confirmed the lack of cohesion between regional strategies and activities, and therefore the benefit of undertaking the IRS. However, it was suggested that the Cooper Simms report had not gone far enough in analysing the gaps and conflicts between the different strategies, and so this should still be undertaken and presented in the Integrated Regional Framework.

A question was asked over how the cross-overs between disciplines and groups would be managed. This is something that needs to be considered as part of the next steps, but an immediate suggestion from the Environment Group was for joint meetings with other groups such as the Economic Policy Group. This could be expanded to reflect other areas where linkages would be beneficial.

Queries were raised over the invites to the workshop, and whether this was the 'usual suspects', and how we could ensure that the aspirations in the IRS were what ordinary people in the region wanted. It was suggested that Members should stimulate debate within their constituent authorities or organisations. The possibility of using focus groups was also mentioned.

Members requested that the circulation list for the Cooper Simms report is made available, so that they can prompt individuals or organisations to respond to the consultation.

Action: Assembly Secretariat to circulate list

The link between the IRS and the Regional Spatial Strategy was stressed, and the importance of these dovetailing together. Clare Brooke confirmed that the timetable for the IRS enabled this to happen, and that the IRS should provide the overarching strategic priorities and objectives, which can then be translated into a spatial strategy through the RSS.

3. Regional Sustainable Development Framework

Jane Lavick reported on the preparation of a progress report for the RSDF, which will go to the Regional Assembly on 25 October for consideration and endorsement, and then presented to regional partners at a conference on 27 November. Members were asked to note the date for their diaries, and invitations to the conference will be sent out shortly.

The links between the IRS and RSDF were queried, and it was confirmed that the RSDF would form one of the building blocks for the IRS, indeed it was anticipated that the principles in the RSDF would be carried through into the IRS. Members stressed that it was important not just to focus on the Progress report, but on actually achieving the objectives, and how to promote sustainability 'on the ground'. This could include rolling-out good practice in one part of the region to other areas. Jane Lavick responded that the inclusion of case studies and practical examples in the Progress Report and a proposed regular bulletin were intended to support this, and that the Conference would be the start of discussions with regional partners on what future action was needed. This was supported, and the need to disseminate the report widely to practitioners was stressed, so that they can use it in their work.

Members also suggested the need to promote the RSDF to groups such as the Royal Town Planning Institute, and construction industry associations, who can be a useful route through to their members. Jane Lavick informed Members of an initiative called '*Future Foundations*' to promote sustainable construction, which is a spin-off from the RSDF. Further information can be found on www.futurefoundations.co.uk.

Members queried whether the use of indicators was duplicating the work of the Regional Observatory. The assurance was given that this was not the intention, and that the Progress Report provided a broad overview, compared to much more detailed work carried out by the Observatory. The Regional Observatory had been closely involved in reporting on the indicators. The suggestion was made that we should include an indicator on eco-homes, and this will be fed into discussions with partners on revision of the RSDF indicators.

The importance of the coast for the region, and the need for strong protection of it as a regional asset was raised, along with the view that current policies, for example in RPG10, were not strong enough. It was suggested that this was something the Conference on 27 November could consider.

4. Climate Change Impacts Partnership

Jane Lavick introduced the paper on the Climate Change Impacts Partnership. A detailed technical report has been produced identifying potential impacts of climate change for different sectors, groups and areas. Comments have been invited on the report, and Members' views were sought to inform the Assembly's response.

Members supported further work on the tourism sector, as a critical sector for the region, and one that is likely to experience significant impacts from climate change. A question was raised on where planning fitted into the report, particularly in relation to pressure for housing, the brownfield land target, and the impact of flooding and PPG25 policy influencing where development could be sited. Jane Lavick replied that planning issues were covered in the report, but not as a specific domain, and that comments could be fed back to the Partnership that more should be done to 'signpost' planning issues within the report.

Monitoring was considered to be essential, and that this should be incorporated into the report. It will be important that the adaptations to climate change can be monitored in the region, not just the actual changes in climate.

Members agreed that the implications of the scoping study should feed into Regional Assembly work, particularly the development of the IRS and Regional Spatial Strategy and links to the RSDF, and that these provide an opportunity to consider the long term implications of climate change and how we should adapt to and plan for these.

Members agreed that the Assembly Secretariat should send a response to the Partnership commenting on the draft technical report, taking on board the points made above.

Action: Assembly Secretariat to send comments to Climate Change Partnership

5. Renewable Energy Strategic Framework

Clare Brooke reported on progress with work on renewable energy. The Regional Assembly had endorsed the Renewable Energy Strategic Framework in March 2002, so it was not proposed to submit further comments. Wendy Lutley provided feedback from a consultation event on the Renewable Energy Strategic Framework that she attended yesterday. She reported as a point of information that changes in Government funding were likely in the next 18 months that would make wood renewable energy more economical, and that this needed to be taken on board in any future work. The good examples of renewable energy in the region such as the Holsworthy biomass plant were highlighted.

6. Waste Vision

Cllr Gil Streets reported that the Waste Vision had been agreed by the Waste Group and approved by the Executive Committee, and so would go forward to the Regional Assembly on 25 October for formal adoption. He stressed that it was important for the Vision to be achievable, and therefore that maybe it had not gone as far as some had hoped, however it was felt that the right balance had been struck between being aspirational and achievable. It was also pointed out that the Vision included all waste streams, not just municipal

waste, which was important as there is twice as much commercial waste produced in the South West as municipal waste.

Environment Group members welcomed the Vision. Queries were raised about whether the Vision dealt with cross-border collaboration between authorities and sharing of best practice. Craig Frost responded that the Vision did not include this level of detail, but that it could be something for the Strategy. He offered to make available to Members a document from RTAB on what was happening with waste plans.

Action: Assembly Secretariat to circulate document

The need for the development of markets for recyclates was raised, particularly in the context that this does not seem to be carried forward in economic business strategies. Craig Frost replied that the RDA had been involved in the process of developing the Vision and are supporting the development of recyclates, for example through support for ReMade Kernow and ReMade South West which promote markets for recyclates. It was recognised that the markets for recyclates were international, and so although there was a need for some regional markets and capacity in the Vision, this had to be seen within a wider context.

Wendy Lutley made a point of information that legislation on agricultural wastes was coming through, which had important implications, particularly in relation to plastic waste from farms.

7. Regional Airports Strategy

Chris Elton informed Members that the Regional Assembly had been invited to respond to the Regional Airports Strategy consultation. The Executive Group had agreed a set of principles to guide the Assembly's response, but had agreed that these should be considered by the Environment Group and any modifications made in the light of this before going out to consultation with the region. The approach being proposed is that the Assembly should examine what the region needs in terms of airport capacity, and not just respond to the scenarios set out in the consultation document. The deadline for consultation responses is the end of November.

Discussion with the Group raised concerns over the predict and provide approach in the consultation document, and concern over the likely environmental impacts of any airport expansion, as well as associated infrastructure requirements. Also the fact that the report had not been made in a multi-modal context. Wendy Lutley advised Members that the Environment Support Group had raised similar concerns, as well as the need to make best use of existing facilities, the need for the claimed economic benefits to be challenged, and concerns that the impacts of noise had not been considered in relation to wider tranquility of the region.

Members also queried the assertion in the consultation document that air transport was cleaner than diesel trains. Wendy Lutley clarified that this was

indeed misleading, and related only to particulates, in relation to CO₂ emissions, air transport was the worst polluter.

It was agreed that the principles for the Assembly's response would be amended to reflect Environment Group comments.

Action: Secretariat to amend principles before sending out to consultation

Wendy Lutley also reported back from the Environment Support Group (ESG) on discussions held regarding SWARMMS and the next steps in the process. ESG has proposed that further work should be carried out to support the 'soft' measures in the SWARMMS package including Green Travel Plans in Principal Urban Areas etc. The Regional Assembly and GOSW are considering the implementation plan at the moment, and ESG will seek to feed into this process through Regional Assembly Transport Officers Support Group. The four statutory Environmental Bodies are writing to the Secretary of State to re-state their concerns over some of the road schemes in SWARMMS.

8. Rural economy

Chris Elton advised Members of the preparations for the Select Committee on the Rural Economy. Members commented that the difference between 'deep' rural areas and those close to urban areas was important to note as the issues affecting these areas was different, and consequently the responses and interventions from the RDA also needed to reflect these different needs. For example, there were opportunities for food links between rural hinterlands and urban areas as the producers and their markets were close together. The work of the Countryside Agency on identifying these differences was suggested for reference. Chris Elton responded that the RDA had used similar classifications in the State of the Region report produced to inform the Regional Economic Strategy, but how this was applied in relation to RDA programmes was something that could possibly be examined by the Select Committee.

The RDA's engagement with land based industries was raised as a possible line of inquiry, as well as how they contributed to village infrastructure.

9. Regional Economic Strategy

Chris Elton reported that a response to the draft RES was being prepared following discussions with Member Groups. Some of the views from other groups include concern over who would be responsible for delivering the actions in the RES, and questions over the feasibility of delivering some of its aspirations. The consultation period ends on 11 October, and Chris Elton is meeting with the RDA to discuss the Assembly's comments. The Regional Assembly will consider the final RES on 25 October for endorsement. This does not allow time for the revised draft to be circulated with Assembly papers, so the Chairs of Groups will be asked to speak to the new draft based on a briefing provided by the Secretariat.

The main area of discussion centred around the environment driver, and concerns over how this was currently worded. Members felt that it gave the impression of the environment being an asset to be exploited for economic gain. It was agreed that alternative wording should be suggested, perhaps along the lines of using the environment 'skillfully' which give more of an impression of the need for careful consideration, a more managed process, and linking with the skills agenda as a means of bridging the gap between using and enhancing the environment.

Action: Assembly Secretariat to raise concerns over the wording of the environment driver with SWRDA and seek alternative wording in the final RES