

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

ENVIRONMENT GROUP

Wednesday 24 April 2002

PRESENT:

Members

Pat Hockey	South Gloucs (in the Chair)
Noel Cartwright	West Devon DC
Nolan Clarke	Dartmoor National Park
Ann Clitheroe	SEP
Caroline Dudley	SEP
Bob Eccles	Gloucs CC
Wendy Lutley	CPRE (Observer)
Steven Pugsley	West Somerset DC
William Spiers	Wiltshire CC
Chanel Stevens	North Somerset Council

Officers

Clare Brooke	Head of Strategy
Chris Elton	Director of Policy and Strategy
Sandra Fryer	Chair of Officers Support Group
Sue Watts	Secretariat

Apologies for absence

Malcolm Hanney, Julian Johnson, Alun Thomas and Martin Ross.

1. Terms of Reference and outline Work Programme

- 1.1 Clare Brooke introduced this paper. Members were encouraged to consider how they wanted the Group to work; they may wish to invite experts to meetings from time to time, or hold meetings in other venues, or to organise Seminars or Workshops. They also needed to link with other member groups and keep an eye on their work programmes, as environmental matters cut across all of the Assembly's work.
- 1.2 Members agreed that they would like to work in a variety of ways, whatever was most appropriate to the issue they were investigating. The Terms of Reference were agreed.
- 1.3 The key to the Work Programme was the development of the Regional Environment Strategy, one of several regional strategies which in due course would form the Integrated Regional Strategy. A broad spectrum of environmental issues were outlined, including renewable energy, Strategic Environmental Assessment, RDA Scrutiny and climate change.
- 1.4 Clare then invited the Group to nominate champions for the four principal themes of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) which were of particular relevance to this

Group – Climate Change (Noel Cartwright), Biodiversity and Landscapes (Nolan Clarke), Natural Resources and Waste (Ann Clitheroe), and Coast and Maritime Environment (Steven Pugsley). Clare Brooke said that a meeting of all the “champions” would be arranged in the near future, to clarify their roles, and to assist the preparation of the Framework’s Annual Report.

- 1.5 The timetable for the Work Programme was discussed. An interim report on Waste would come to the July meeting of this Group, following the close of the consultation on the “Vision” document.
- 1.6 Chris Elton outlined the procedure for dealing with the outcome of the SWARMMS, and confirmed that members of this Group had been invited to the presentation by Halcrow on 22nd May.
- 1.7 Noel Cartwright asked for an update on the work of the Regional Environmental Observatory and it was agreed to circulate all members with a copy of their Spring update CD. It was also agreed that someone from the Environment Agency should be invited to meetings in future.

2. Regional Environment Strategy

- 2.1 The purpose of this report was to seek members’ views on the proposals for the development of the Regional Environment Strategy. Sandra Fryer said that there was a significant amount of information available and a potentially wide range of issues to consider. It was hoped that the key objectives and priorities for action would emerge from a Workshop to be held in June. Members were invited to suggest nominees to attend this Workshop, in addition to the normal invitees. It was intended to have an attendance of between 20 and 30.
- 2.2 In response to a question about the timescale for this Strategy as compared to other regional strategies, Clare Brooke said that the proposal was to bring them all together into one Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS), and this was targeted for completion in April 2003. Consultants would be engaged in the autumn to look at different regional scenarios.
- 2.3 Later in the autumn the first draft of the Environment Strategy would be available. This would be an interim document, and form one strand of the IRS. The Chairman asked that para 6.2 be therefore amended to say “interim” rather than “final” document.
- 2.4 Caroline Dudley expressed concern at the relative lack of reference to the historic environment. She asked that account be taken of the Regional Cultural Strategy, and told members about the work currently being done in Cornwall on regional distinctiveness and industrial heritage, as part of Objective 1.
- 2.5 Clare Brooke confirmed that English Heritage was involved with the Officer Support Group (OSG), that the Regional Cultural Strategy would be one of the strategies included in the IRS, and that the National Trust was on the Regional Environment Network (REN). In response to a question about the role of DEFRA, it was agreed that Tim Render should be invited to the workshop. Sandra Fryer commented that the membership of OSG was not closed, and

should be checked to ensure that it was fit for purpose now that its role was clearer.

3. Coastal Issues

- 3.1 Clare Brooke commented that the coast was very important to the region, and much of it was of national importance. There was value in looking at the coast regionally, which was why the Prospectus for the South West Coast had been drafted. It identified the importance of the coast to the region, set out a vision, and identified nine coastal themes where a regional approach was needed.
- 3.2 The draft Prospectus recommended that a strategic framework for the coast was developed. It would comprise four elements:-
- The establishment of a bi-annual SW Coastal Conference
 - Specific task groups to tackle the issues identified (where not covered by existing mechanisms)
 - A small Regional Coastal Issues Steering Group to oversee the strategic framework, and
 - A regional information source linked to the Regional Observatory.
- 3.3 It was stressed that the object was not to duplicate what was already happening, but to add value. It was proposed that the Assembly responded to the Prospectus, including the nine key themes, and, in due course, identify a member to sit on the Steering Group. Clare Brooke stressed that the Assembly was not committed to anything specific in terms of how it responded, and consideration would be given later as to how it should be involved.
- 3.4 In response to a question raised by Bob Eccles about the Severn Barrage scheme, Chris Elton replied that this was one of the many issues which he would shortly be discussing with the Welsh Assembly.
- 3.5 The Group agreed to recommend that the Regional Assembly:-
- Welcomed the production of the Prospectus for the South Coast, and
 - Responded to the nine themes identified where appropriate through Regional Planning Guidance, the RSDF and development of the IRS.

4. Strategic Environmental Assessment Project

- 4.1 A paper had been circulated to members to inform them of the progress being made in relation to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) project currently being undertaken by the Assembly, in conjunction with a number of key partners.
- 4.2 The European Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment came into force last year, and by the summer of 2004 the UK Government would have to integrate it these requirements into law. SEA would require national, regional and local authorities to carry out environmental assessment on certain plans and programmes they were promoting.

- 4.3 Funding from the ERN had been available, as it was something all regions had to do, and the results of the research would be shared, although the work was being done in the south west. There had been good recognition of the early work, and DTLR were very interested; they were now doing a national project of their own.
- 4.4 The first phase, on Data Needs, was complete, and the reports were available on the Assembly's Website. The second phase would be started shortly, which would consist of a range of pilot projects to evaluate how the SEA could be used to take forward the RSDF. Phase 3 would be the promotion of the key findings and examples of good practice, and would input to the DTLR's work on implementing the Directive. Guidance would be developed, and organisations encouraged to sign up to following a consistent approach. The project was due for completion by March 2003.
- 4.5 Ann Clitheroe commented that the purpose of SEA was the long term benefit to the environment, and this needed stating. She also asked about the review period. Clare Brooke said that the role of the Assembly was stronger in terms of planning, and checks would be made on local authorities to see how they were implementing SEA in this respect. It would be the responsibility of DTLR to review how SEA was being implemented, but a timetable is not yet known for this.

5. The Climate Change Partnership

- 5.1 Sandra Fryer outlined the project details, the setting up of the South West Climate Change Partnership and the Assembly's input to it. A Steering Group had been set up, chaired by the Environment Agency and including a representative from the Assembly, to drive forward work on regional climate change. A wider network also existed to disseminate the work widely within the region.
- 5.2 The timetable for Phase 1 of the work culminated in a final technical report in September 2002. Sandra Fryer feared that the timetable was already slipping, and said she would keep members informed of progress.

6. Regional Waste Strategy

- 6.1 Members received a report updating them on progress with the regional Waste Strategy. The "Vision" document, launched on 1 February, was out for consultation until the end of June, and a series of seminars and workshops were being held around the region to provide opportunities for partners to input to its development. The results of the consultation would be drawn together in a finalised Vision statement which would be presented to the full Assembly at its meeting on 12 July.
- 6.2 The Environment Group was invited to contribute to the process, and to participate in the regional workshops.
- 6.3 In relation to the RSDF, it was suggested that as waste was such a major regional issue, it should be split from the theme on natural resources and waste - although in some ways, waste could also be

seen as a resource. Clare Brooke said that there was no problem in separating the topics – the Group could have as many “champions” as it liked, but from the point of view of the RSDF, it was too late to make any changes, as it was already finalised and published. She thought it was unlikely that the importance of waste as a regional issue would be under-estimated.

- 6.4 The Chairman suggested that it would be sensible to leave any separation of waste from natural resources, or the nomination of any further champions, until the proposed meeting of champions had been held.
- 6.5 Clare Brooke informed members that a consultation on changes to the Landfill Tax Credit scheme was under way. There was concern over the operation of the current scheme, which was doing nothing to tackle waste issues. The Assembly was proposing to respond to the consultation, saying that more money was needed for waste management, and trying to ensure that the south west got its fair share of any government money. Craig Frost’s paper would be circulated to members for their comments.

7. Training needs in Environmental Skills

- 7.1 This report had been prepared by Wendy Lutley of the CPRE on behalf of the Assembly’s Environment Officers’ Group.
- 7.2 Chris Elton explained that the Scrutiny of the RDA had now moved onto Skills and Learning, and a Select Committee was being held in Torquay on 19th June. This would be a starting point, and the Committee would be seeking information and trying to identify gaps. A lot was going on in the region in this area, but it was not being properly co-ordinated.
- 7.3 The focus would be on continuous professional development. Colleges and schools were offering environmental-type courses, but it was still possible to come out at the end with no real environmental training.
- 7.4 It was noted that Gloucestershire and Bristol were missing from the list of Small Business Services which covered the region, and were involved with Horizon South West, a regional network for green business clubs. Sandra Fryer offered to look into this.
- 7.5 In response to a question about how LSCs fitted into the process, it was confirmed that they would be among the experts called to advise the Select Committee. Chris Elton explained to members about the new Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA) which the RDA had to produce, in consultation with regional partners. The LSCs would also have a role to play in the production of the Framework – although they largely worked in the post-16 sector, they also had a remit in the 14-16 age range. Sandra Fryer confirmed that there was a regional LSC (although not by that name), and they ran in parallel with the RDA. She was concerned that all their work be taken forward in a joined up way.
- 7.6 Clare Brooke said that the ERN was also developing training in sustainability, and the South West Provincial Employers were involved with this work. One pilot course had been held so far, and

there was now discussion taking place about whether to hold a second. If a second pilot was held, members of the Environment Group could be invited to attend. Members would be kept informed.

- 7.7 Members requested more information about other regional groups which had an environmental interest and their relationship with the Assembly. Clare Brooke said that this information would be produced as part of the mapping which she would be undertaking during the compilation of the Integrated Regional Strategy.

8. Dates of Further Meetings

4th July, at 2.00 p.m.

11th October, at 10.30 a.m.

11th December, at 10.30 a.m.

CHAIRMAN