

Hertfordshire County Council

Hertfordshire Rural Forum

# Consultation on draft Aims and Objectives

for consideration at the Steering Group meeting on August 8 2005

July 2005

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## 1. Summary

1.1 A draft set of Aims and Objectives for the Hertfordshire Rural Forum (HRF) was approved by the Advisory Group of the Forum in June 2005.

1.2 54 individuals, representing the member organisations of the HRF, were then emailed a questionnaire that:

- Set out the draft Aims and Objectives
- Provided the opportunity to indicate the extent to which consultees agreed or disagreed that each of the 6 draft Aims and Objectives was appropriate for the HRF.

1.3 During the consultation period of 3 weeks, completed questionnaires were received from 10 individuals. This figure represents 24% of the membership that is not part of the Advisory Group.

1.4 94% of the responses indicate agreement that the individual draft Aims and Objectives are appropriate for the HRF, with 31% of responses indicating strong agreement. Greatest agreement overall is with the Aims and Objectives relating to "networking and knowledge" and "championing and influencing". Reservations were made by some respondents in respect of some individual Aims: mostly these reservations are to do with perceived lack of clarity or duplication in the wording of the Aim.

1.5 Assuming suitable changes can be made to the wording of the Aims to meet the concerns expressed by respondents, there are 16 organisations (including those on the Advisory Group) that fully agree with the draft Aims and Objectives: this is 53% of the organisations that were consulted.

## 2. Aims

2.1 The aims of the consultation were:

- i) To seek the views of current members and potential members of the Hertfordshire Rural Forum (HRF) on a draft Statement of Aims and Objectives for the HRF.
- ii) To give consultees the opportunity to identify their level of commitment to each of the separate Aims and Objectives of the HRF.

### Background

2.2 Project Partners (PP) has been helping Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to review the HRF and recommend options for taking the work of the HRF forward over the next 3 years.

2.3 As part of this process, PP prepared a draft Statement of Aims and Objectives for the HRF. To capture the aspirations of HRF members, whilst ensuring the HRF fits with evolving national and regional Forum frameworks, the Statement was arrived at by:

- Undertaking a PEST (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) analysis of the macro-environment in which the HRF operates in order to identify the external trends affecting the rural communities of Hertfordshire.
- Reviewing information about the HRF, including the outputs from a meeting and workshop held on 25 February 2005.
- Reviewing the aims and objectives of six other Rural Affairs Fora.

2.4 This draft Statement was presented to and discussed at a meeting of the Advisory Group on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2005. The draft set of Aims and Objectives on which the members were consulted was approved at this meeting. Each of the draft Aims and Objectives are listed, and the responses to them analysed, below in "Results".

### 3. Method

3.1 HCC provided a list of 54 named individuals representing different organisations that are current members of the HRF. PP emailed to each named individual:

- A primer outlining the background to the consultation process
- A questionnaire on the draft Aims and Objectives.

The primer gave contact information for the Advisory Group members and assured consultees that the organisations they represented were not being asked to make a formal commitment to the HRF at this stage. Consultees were advised that the Advisory Group would take into consideration the views expressed in the replies to the consultation.

3.2 The questionnaire listed each of the 6 draft Aims and Objectives and invited consultees to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the 6 as being appropriate for the HRF by ticking one of the following boxes:

<b>I strongly agree</b> that this is appropriate for the Herts Rural Forum	<b>I agree</b> that this is appropriate for the Herts Rural Forum	<b>I tend to agree</b> that this is appropriate for the Herts Rural Forum	<b>I tend to disagree</b> that this is appropriate for the Herts Rural Forum	<b>I disagree</b> that this is appropriate for the Herts Rural Forum	<b>I strongly disagree</b> that this is appropriate for the Herts Rural Forum
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Consultees were also invited to comment on each of the 6 Aims and Objectives.

3.3 The consultation began on 22<sup>nd</sup> June with the emailing of the primer and consultation questionnaire and ran to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2005.<sup>2</sup> Consultees were invited to complete the questionnaire and return it by email to PP and were offered the opportunity to have their replies treated anonymously if they wished.

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<sup>2</sup> The first email to consultees was followed by a reminder email on 6 July 2005.

## 4. Results and discussion

4.1 54 people were consulted, including the 12 members of the Advisory Group. 15 people responded to the consultation, including 2 members of the Advisory Group.

- 11 people filled out and returned a questionnaire, including 1 member of the Advisory Group
- 2 people indicated their intention to complete the questionnaire, but did not actually do so
- 1 member of the Advisory Group responded, without completing a questionnaire
- 1 consultee responded after the consultation period but without completing the questionnaire.

Overall the response rate was rather low for this kind of targeted direct consultation. While one respondent tried to return the questionnaire, but succeeded only in sending in a blank file, we do not believe there were technical barriers to participation in the consultation: but otherwise we draw no conclusions from the low participation.

4.2 2 respondents requested anonymity. The 9 other organisations that returned questionnaires were:

Herts Prosperity  
Hertfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils  
Chilterns AONB  
East of England Development Agency  
Country Land and Business Association  
North Herts Council  
Herts Association for Young People  
Rural Stress Information Network  
CDA for Herts.

4.3 Each of the 6 Aims and Objectives is presented below. The table below each Aim and Objective gives individual responses and the average of all responses scored on a scale of 1 to 6 where:

1 equates to "**I strongly disagree** that this is appropriate for the HRF"  
2 equates to "**I disagree** that this is appropriate for the HRF"  
3 equates to "**I tend to disagree** that this is appropriate for the HRF"  
4 equates to "**I tend to agree** that this is appropriate for the HRF"  
5 equates to "**I agree** that this is appropriate for the HRF"  
6 equates to "**I strongly agree** that this is appropriate for the HRF".

**1. To share knowledge and disseminate good practice on rural issues between its members.**

Scores											Av.
5	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	<b>5.4</b>

4.4 All respondents agreed that this is appropriate for the HRF, with 4 respondents strongly agreeing.

4.5 Three respondents commented on the objective: The Country Land and Business Association, while agreeing with the objective, felt that "real action and not just a talking shop" was needed, citing the follow-up to the HRF conference on fly-tipping as an example of HRF leading the way. The Herts Association for Young People said their agreement was dependent on there being no other forum that does this. One anonymous respondent who agreed strongly with the objective did so on the grounds that currently there is no other vehicle for doing this and noted that "communication is key".

**2. To foster communication and disseminate information between Hertfordshire's rural businesses and organisations who are not members of the Forum.**

Scores											Av
5	6	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	6	4	<b>4.9</b>

4.6 All respondents agreed with this objective, but with more people "tending to agree" than "agreeing strongly".

4.7 Four respondents added comments: The Association of Parish and Town Councils, while tending to agree with what it calls a "worthy aim" is concerned that "it could prove open-ended and costly". The Country Land and Business Association and one other anonymous respondent identified the importance of the HRF communicating with a wide audience, and the CLA commented on the particular importance of reaching the private sector. A somewhat different perspective was offered by EEDA who would want to ensure that work undertaken to deliver this aim complements and does not duplicate the role of Business Link and other business-support organisations.

**3. To influence the development of the rural dimension of local and regional policies.**

Scores											Av
5	6	5	6	3	6	5	5	6	6	4	<b>5.2</b>

4.8 There was general agreement with this objective, with 5 respondents "agreeing strongly". However, EEDA tended towards disagreeing with this objective on the grounds that it "appears superfluous given Aim 4" and therefore suggested combining the two.

4.9 Comments were added by three other respondents: The Country Land and Business Association strongly agreed, noting that rural issues seem to come low in many local and regional policies, and cited policies for economic development and planning as being a vital area of work for the HRF. Another anonymous respondent who strongly agreed commented that, without a say in policy decisions, the HRF "will not gain the respect of the communities they are trying to help"

4.10 A more cautions note was sounded by The Association of Parish and Town Councils to the effect that while influence could be brought to bear on local policies, their own recent experience is that regional policy makers are not open to influence.

**4. To provide advocacy and promotion of rural issues.**

Scores											Av
5	6	3	6	6	4	5	5	6	5	5	<b>5.1</b>

4.11 All but one respondent agreed with this aim, with 4 respondents agreeing strongly. The Association of Parish and Town Councils tended to disagree on the grounds that "although membership of the Rural Forum is reasonably comprehensive, we do not have a democratic mandate to promote specific issues."

4.12 EEDA, who agreed strongly with the aim, believed it should also incorporate what they see as the strategic nature of Aim 3 and suggested that the wording could then be:

"To advocate rural issues and work to promote and influence the rural dimensions of local & regional policy".

**5. To provide support to rural communities by brokering relationships and fostering inclusive cross-sectoral partnerships of benefit to the rural community, economy and environment.**

Scores											Av
5	4	5	6	5	4	6	4	6	6	4	<b>4.6</b>

4.13 All respondents agreed with this, but with 5 people agreeing strongly and 4 only tending to agree, the degree of commitment to this Aim among respondents is wide.

4.14 While the Association of Town and Parish Councils noted that, as a cross-sectoral body, the HRF is well-positioned to help in this way, Herts Prosperity suggested that this aim should be bracketed with Aim 6 as "Facilitation" rather than "Project Facilitation" which suggests a narrower role than that envisaged.

4.15 The Country Land and Business Association tended to agree, but observed that they were not sure they understood "the jargon" in the Aim.

**6. To support members to develop and sustain their capacity to meet the needs of their stakeholders.**

Scores											Av
5	3	2	4	4	5	5	4	5	6	-	<b>4.3</b>

4.17 Responses ranged from disagreement to strong agreement with, on balance, a tendency to agreement.

4.18 Three respondents offered comments: The Association of Town and Parish Councils disagreed with the aim because "as currently constituted, we do not have the means to offer such support comprehensively over a sustained timespan or wide area."

4.19 The one anonymous respondent who agreed strongly with the aim noted that "it is really important that we never lose sight of what our stakeholders want and we strive to provide it constantly".

4.20 The Country Land and Business Association agreed with the aim on the understanding that its meaning is to "ensure members are able to really make a difference to the people of rural Hertfordshire' rather than enable the members to simply tick boxes to obtain funding for various projects". The Association suggested that simplification of the wording is required.

## 5. Discussion

5.1 The returned questionnaires indicate broad agreement with the draft Aims and Objectives, with 94% of all responses being in agreement. Strongest agreement would seem to be for the 4 aims that were paired in the questionnaire as "networking and knowledge" and "championing and influencing". Support for the 2 aims that were bracketed under "project facilitation" is a little more equivocal and diluted.

5.2 In going out to consultation, we had anticipated consultees' commitment to the Aims and Objectives as falling into one of three possible categories:

- Full agreement
- Partial agreement, or agreement with reservation
- No agreement or apathy.

5.3 The responses to the questionnaire show that 5 of the 11 respondents are in full agreement with the draft Aims and Objectives. They are:

- Herts Prosperity
- Chilterns AONB
- North Herts Council
- Rural Stress Information Network
- An anonymous respondent.

5.4 6 respondents are in partial agreement, or agreement with reservations. They are:

- Herts Association for Young People
- Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils
- EEDA
- Country Land and Business Association
- CDA for Herts
- An anonymous respondent.

5.5 Details about the reservations are given in the preceding section "Results", but in summary:

- Herts Association for Young People is in agreement (or agreement with reservations) with all 6 Aims and Objectives.
- An anonymous respondent, EEDA, the Country Land and Business Association and CDA for Herts are in agreement (or agreement with reservations) with 5 of the Aims and Objectives.
- The Association of Parish and Town Councils is in agreement (or agreement with reservations) with 4 of the Aims and Objectives.

5.6 While we assume that all members of the Advisory Group are in full agreement with the draft Aims and Objectives, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the views of those other consultees who did not return a questionnaire.

5.7 Assuming that the members of Advisory Group are in full agreement, the level of agreement with the draft Aims and Objectives can be summarised as follows:

<b>Full Agreement</b>	<b>Partial Agreement or agreement with reservations</b>
Herts Prosperity	Herts Association for Young People
Chilterns AONB	Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils
North Herts Council	East of England Development Agency
Rural Stress Information Network	Country Land and Business Association
Herts County Council	An anonymous respondent
Dacorum CVS	
East Herts Council	
Government Office -East	
Herts CDA	
Bedfordshire RCC	
An anonymous respondent	

## 6. Recommendations

6.1 We recommend that the Advisory Group:

- Reconsider Aims 3 and 4 in light of the comments received from EEDA and its proposal to amalgamate them into one Aim that reads:

**“To advocate rural issues and work to promote and influence the rural dimensions of local & regional policy”.**

- Reconsider the wording of Aims 5 and 6 with a view to simplifying the language and minimising the use of jargon.

6.2 Subject to reaching agreement on recommendations above, the Advisory Group should adopt the draft Aims and Objectives as the agreed Aims and Objectives for the Hertfordshire Rural Forum.