

Rural Landowners Forum Update

Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee - 24 June 2021

Report of: Strategic Head of Property and Commercial

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Peter Fleming

Contact Officers: Strategic Head of Property Ext. 7099

Recommendation to Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee:

The report be noted.

Reason for recommendation: To update Members on the role and work of the Rural Landowners Forum.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Council engages with the private sector on numerous levels. Such engagement ensures the Council tempers its policies, strategies and/or initiatives to ensure they address the needs of residents and businesses within the District. It also allows the Council to develop or promote initiatives that could potentially be collaboratively delivered. In addition, it provides a platform for officers to provide joined up thinking in supporting private sector initiatives, where considered appropriate to do so. In this regard, the economic and social benefits and value these initiative bring to the District are always considered.
- 2 To support the Council's People and Places and Economic Development agenda, the Council has set up three key fora, viz.:
 - a. Rural Landowners Forum (to discuss rural land matters given that 93% of the District is classified as rural and 60% as AONB)
 - b. Sevenoaks Business Forum (to discuss issues pertinent to supporting local businesses)
 - c. Visitor Economy Forum (its focus being matters relating to tourism and marketing)
- 3 These fora have been of significant assistance to the Council as they not only provide the Council with first-hand knowledge and experience of issues these private sector organisations face, but also allows the Council to

informally tap into their expertise and use them as “sounding boards”. For example, all of these fora have in the recent past assisted in shaping the brief and findings associated with the emerging Place Campaign and also helped set the direction of travel for the emerging Economic Development Strategy. The Business Forum was also recently consulted on potential initiatives that Welcome Back Funding could be used for.

- 4 The respective fora have also assisted the Council in developing relationships with the private sector.
- 5 The Rural Landowners Forum (RLF) was established pre-2010. Its primary purpose is for the Council to engage with representative key rural landowners in the District to understand issues that affect them and the District and inform the development of appropriate strategies, policies and initiatives. The forum is chaired by the Leader of the Council supported by a number of Portfolio Holders, and meets once a year. The agenda is set by the landowners.
- 6 At the most recent meeting, the group discussed how landowners can help formulate policy and strategy for the rural economy to bounce back from Covid-19; dealing with anti-social behaviour on private land and rural broadband connectivity. The RLF was recently instrumental in providing informal input in the Countryside Code Plan, and together with the Business Forum, is providing informal comment on the reuse of redundant farm buildings. The Council also shares its own updates, which has included West Kent Leader project progress and changes to the planning systems consultation and Local Plan.
- 7 RLF private sector members are also involved in numerous initiatives, and where appropriate and possible, the Council is signposting these members to appropriate resources within the Council and other partnership organisations, such as Kent Invicta, Kent Police, Kent County Council, etc. As many of these initiatives are ad hoc, we thought it would be appropriate for the Committee to be given a brief overview of some of the activities and ideas that two private landowners have.
- 8 At Committee, we will receive verbal updates from:
 - Eliza Ecclestone from St Clere Estate, and
 - Sue Green from the Montreal Estate.
- 9 These verbal updates will provide committee with insights as to how the RLF works, the value it derives and also how these landowners are adopting initiatives that support the Council’s agenda in rural land management and conservation, job creation and enterprise development.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal or risk implications related to this report.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users at this point, but further assessments will be undertaken as the strategy begins to take shape.

Conclusions

The report and verbal presentation to be given to the Advisory Committee is to update the Committee on the work being undertaken by the Rural Landowners Forum.

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Detlev Munster

Strategic Head of Property & Commercial