

RURAL & FOOD ECONOMY

Wednesday 13 December 2017, 10:30am
Smith & Williamson, Bristol

Attendees:

Chris Head, Claire Ladkin, Chris Lyons, Mike Amos, Mandie Berry, Steve Ashworth, Chris Smith, Matthew Uren, Antony Merritt, Melissa Houston, Deborah White.

Actions arising from the meeting held 23.08.2017:

- All correct
 - One email with comments on the West of England discussion paper was received and forwarded to the WECA strategy team.
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LEP/WECA/West of England Strategy update:

LEP:

- Currently refreshing the business positions on the LEP Board. Positive response with over 50 individuals registering their interest. Aiming to have the new board in place by January's meeting.

Growth Hub:

- Awaiting formal funding letter from BEIS. This will determine the level on growth going forward (sign posting portal or Growth Plus). Sam Bell is also working on coordinating stakeholder meetings to understand what more the Hub could do and how best to promote.

West of England Strategy paper:

- Launched on the 27th July and we spent 9 weeks engaging with key stakeholders. This was not a formal consultation
 - We used a mixture of methods to engagement, both on and offline.
 - Nearly 4K people visited the strategy page on the WECA website
 - We held 6 different drop-in sessions around the 4 UA areas where 20 people came and spoke to us 121
 - 7 roundtables were held – 3 hosted by WECA and 4 by external partners
 - We received over 40 email submissions and 301 responses via the online survey
 - Some interesting comments and concerns from both the email submissions and the free text boxes within the survey – some key themes to come out were:
 - Clarity on Governance - a request for more information around the relationship between WECA, the LEP and the Unitary Authorities and the relationship between this draft strategy and the JSP, JTS.
 - Equality, diversity, inclusive growth and skills development – how will the strategy really benefit all
 - The environment featured strongly as another challenge. There was disappointment that we didn't specifically reference: Climate change, air quality and protecting our natural environment.
 - Visitor Economy was mentioned several times: How it interconnects with our 3 pillars and a need for the region to acknowledge the value of the tourism sector.
 - The importance of the creative and tech sectors – both separately and collaboratively
 - More details with various online stats will be uploaded onto the WECA website in due course.
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EAFRD / LEADER update:

- EAFRD min £500k funding match
- ESIF - has a rural element (building better opportunities)
 - Includes access fund for rural areas (primarily for transport costs)

- EAFRD Growth Fund (£1.4m) - Tourism, Food Tech & SME business support
 - 2 stage application process
 - Investment sub-group see EOI & can comment on local fit
 - Everything else is done by DEFRA
 - SMEs struggling with process, need hand-holding. Don't have support
 - LEADER
 - Have 25 projects, created 21.5 jobs, allocated £870k
 - LEADER programme meeting next week, 3 interesting projects - could take over the £1m
 - Have another £925k of projects endorsed in pipeline ready to come forward - will take us over £1.4m pot
 - Average grant is £35k; average cost per job is £30k
 - In future, DEFRA will be focused on agriculture et al; rest of rural economy will go into 'National Prosperity fund' via BEIS & DCLG
 - Difference is LEADER has technical assistance, EAFRD doesn't (we are one of only two places in England where EAFRD & LEADER are the same geography)
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Food / Health & Life Sciences / High Tech collaboration:

- Things have gone a little quiet but it's still felt that we're stronger together and that there are links between food and health that we should pursue.

ACTION: Chris L to follow up with Richard Luxton (chair of Health & Life Sciences)

- Should this sector group consider recreating the same format as the H&LS sector group – continued meetings and introduce regular, informal meetups to network more with the Food/Rural community?
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Food Tech Conference:

- Smith & Williamson are keen to hold a Food Tech Conference in 2018 - somewhere in Bristol.
 - Businesses who use tech in businesses and/or where tech is used in relation to food (i.e. web apps etc).
 - Just Eat have expressed an interest to be involved.
- It'll be a free event, before the end of May if possible. If not, it could coincide with Food Connections which is held in early June.

ACTION: Steve to provide more information as event develops.

Food Connections update:

- Claire provided a quick update on what Food Connections is:
 - It is a public engagement event in partnership with the BBC (Food Farming Awards) and Bristol City Council.
 - "Food Week" will engage wider (not just Bristol) to do something around food, with big pillar organisations holding events.
 - Aiming for around 200 events – organised by others under the 'Food Connections' umbrella. The Food Connections team will in return help with marketing their event.
 - Mike Amos suggested Claire work in partnership with Open Farm Sunday which also happens in early June.
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Food Works

- Change of spec on building = a request for additional funding.
 - Subject to approval due to start on site April/May
 - 8 operators interested (range of private/Uni) likely to be consortium)
 - Looking for pilot revenue funding for food business support
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Rural & Food Group 2018 – strategy, priorities and key areas

- Once the business members of the LEP Board are in place, see if there is an individual that could “champion” the sector.
- This is a unique group and there is a need for something overarching and to keep a strategic view.
 - Do we become a food group? (but not forgetting “rural”)
 - Have we got information coming in? How do we engage with business?

Food connects to people > educate people, help them to understand the industry > people caring about the rural environment.

AOB

Elizabeth Le Breton:

Have your say on a new food plan for South Gloucestershire

We are working with partners to develop a food plan to create a healthier and more sustainable food system for our area. We are looking to identifying the key needs and challenges, and provide a framework for coordinated action. To have your say on the draft plan visit www.southglos.gov.uk/foodconsultation

Dates for 2018 – calendar invites to follow

- Wednesday 31 January: Smith & Williamson, Bristol
- Wednesday 21 March
- Wednesday 16 May