



South East Forum for Sustainability Annual Report 2009-10

1. POLICY & EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (P&EC)

- SEFS membership for 2009/10 was made up of 54 full members and 1 associate member. Significantly lower than in previous years. However, membership income increased due to additional support from the larger members. SEFS held two membership meetings in 2009/10. We had a variety of interesting speakers as well as the usual internal SEFS discussions.
- At the GM we discussed the Sub National Review, SEFS Transport and Behaviour Change, the South East Biodiversity Strategy and Local Development Frameworks. At the AGM we looked at the new regional structures, achieving a Sustainable South East (SE), Sustainable Rural Communities for the 21st Century and the Greening Campaign. Lynnette Leeson from Sussex Wildlife Trust agreed to continue as SEFS Chair and was re-elected at the AGM.
- P&EC met 7 times during 2009/10 and there were also regular management team meetings. The full complement of seats were taken and include RSPB, CPRE SE, Wildlife Trusts in the SE, National Trust SE Region, Friends of the Earth SE, Railfuture London & SE, Woodland Trust, WWF – UK, CTC South East, Association of Preservation Trusts SE, Groundwork SE and Food Matters.
- The SNR and changes to Regional Governance have dominated SEFS discussions at P&EC and there was much discussion about engagement with the South East England Partnership Board and its associated bodies. However P&EC also found time, amongst other things to discuss, RES Action Plans, Transport issues (particularly Aviation and delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy (DaSTS), Water Framework Directive, transferring SEFS employment and finances from Surrey Wildlife Trust to the Environment Centre, the Environmental Summit, the Regional Strategy and Sustainability Appraisal
- SEFS worked closely with the wider stakeholders on potential engagement with the SE England Partnership Board

2. SEFS PLANNING GROUP (LEAD IAN HEPBURN)

SEFS started working on the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which came to be known as the South East Plan back in 2003. After nearly 7 years of input to consultations, discussions, responses, etc SEFS was pleased to see the Plan finally published by GOSE in May 2009. It wasn't perfect but there was much we welcomed, such as policies on Green Infrastructure, Sustainable Development, Climate Change etc.

However, the then Labour Government, having changed its whole method of regional spatial planning, prompted a new stream of work on a Single Regional Strategy (SRS) which would replace the SE Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy. SEFS began once more to engage in the processes though with more difficulty as a result of the demise of the Regional Assembly. The SEFS Planning Group secured a place on the Sustainability Sounding Board and sent representatives to the working groups on key topic areas and environmental limits.

3. SEFS HOUSING

With the publication of the South East Plan there was little activity on housing issues until the Partnership Board set up its Housing and Regeneration Board. SEFS expected to have an observer place on this Board but in the end this was denied. SEFS did however put in a written response to the South East Select Committee inquiry into Housing in the South East. SEFS was also invited to have a representative at the hearing but no one was able to attend.

4. SEFS CORE TRANSPORT GROUP - CTG (LEAD PETER ENGLAND)

The group held four meetings in 2009/10 two of which were teleconferences. A small number participate in meetings but documents of relevance are circulated to a larger interest group.

Simon Pratt continued to represent SEFS on the Regional Transport Board (RTB) and attended meetings in April, July and October 2009 and in March 2010. Issues discussed of major interest to SEFS were the Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS) studies, Hastings Bexhill Link Road, emerging proposals for High Speed Rail 2 (HS2) and a programme still heavily weighted towards road building schemes.

Following release of the draft DaSTS Regional studies SEFS attended a peer review on 16 March, hosted by the SE Partnership Board, to consider the environmental aspects of the studies. Following the meeting SEFS submitted a written response, expressing concern that consideration of the full range of potential environmental impacts did not seem to figure in all the studies and that smarter choices as a solution to transport problems had little prominence.

A Sustrans research paper into the extent of consultation in respect of the next round of Local Transport Plans (LTP3s), across the region, was discussed by CTG and posted on the SEFS website.

5. SEFS BEHAVIOUR CHANGE WORK

In April 2009 SEFS received the second tranche of two years of funding from SEEDA. The funding gave a focus for developing a project on Behaviour Change. Using this funding SEFS has:

- Developed a Communications Plan to cascade the SEFS Behaviour Change messages both internally and externally
- Attempted to progress the issue of Behaviour Change and who is leading on it within the region with GOSE and looked to encourage Natural England and Environment Agency to support the idea of a Regional Behaviour Change Action Plan.
- Sent out tips to members in e-bulletins and had updates on the work in the Autumn 2009 and Spring 2010 newsletters
- Redeveloped the SEFS website and included a section and regular items related to Behaviour Change
- Run an item in the National Trust Thames & Solent members magazine Autumn 2009 on ecological footprint and behaviour change
- Made links with the Greening Campaign by face to face meeting and inviting a speaker to the SEFS 2009 AGM. They were invited to join SEFS but have not taken up the offer.
- Set up a project to produce a Behaviour Change leaflet "Small Choices Big Difference" (which was published in June 2010)

6. WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE – Report from the SE River Basin District environmental NGOs (SE RDB eNGOs) Group

SEFS 'Water Group' continued to act as the focal point for the eNGO network for this river basin district; Ian Hepburn (WTSE) and Steve Gilbert (RSPB) continue to be the eNGO Liaison Panel reps. At the end of last year the group, because of its engagement in the process, was asked to endorse the final River Basin Management Plan for the South East. However the eNGOs were unwilling to do this for a number of reasons. They were disappointed with the outcome as follows:

- The level of ambition for improvement is currently unacceptably low. The revised pledge, to work together towards a 6% improvement in status by 2015 is, in our view, well below the level required to take significant steps towards achieving the objectives of the Directive;
- The classification of water bodies has been undertaken without sufficiently taking on board locally available information (for example from fisheries associations and local conservation groups), which could have assisted the process considerably;
- A very high proportion of the significant actions fall upon the water companies. They are of course important players in the process, but the actions fail to identify sufficient measures to deal with diffuse agricultural pollution and the effects of urban development and transport;
- Relatively few of the Measures are new – many are things that are already happening or were already programmed to occur;
- We feel that our involvement in the Panel has not really led to many changes to the way the Plan has been developed.

These points were made to the Environment Agency and further discussions were held as a result there was a general feeling that there's an olive branch being extended to encourage engagement in RBMP delivery - including improving the ambitions – if not for this first cycle of the Plan, then for the following cycles. A much more accessible summary of the conservation status and objectives of each water body is now available. Together, these might give the eNGOs a reasonably good opportunity to work out how re-engagement with the RBMP might take place – less on process and more on actively contributing to delivering the objectives (and promoting higher ambitions).

7 REGIONAL STRUCTURES

Regional Assembly

As a result of the Sub National Review in March 2009 it was agreed by the Regional Assembly that it should formally dissolve itself. In its place a new Partnership Board was set up.

Partnership Board

The Partnership Board by its nature was closed to stakeholders. However the four stakeholder groups (environmental, social, economic and town & parish councillors) were allocated 2 observer seats between them on the Strategy Board. There was much discussion and debate with the other stakeholders as to how best to engage on this.

SEFS spent time identifying the other boards and bodies that were created (or maintained) as part of the regional re-organisation and took steps to ensure seats where possible and appropriate (Regional Planning Panel, Regional Transport Board, Stakeholder Liaison Board, Regional Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Sounding Board) but was not able to participate with the Housing and Regeneration Board or the Skills and Economic Development Board

SEEDA

Chris Corrigan continued to represent SEFS on the RES Steering Group until it was dissolved and replaced by the Economic Development and Skill Board. SEFS championed the cause of stakeholder engagement with Jim Brathwaite while he was still chair of SEEDA. We were advised at this meeting that further discretionary funding of SEFS for 2010/11 and beyond was unlikely.

Rural Board

Chris Corrigan continued to represent the wider Regional Assembly on the Rural Board until summer 2009 when Lynnette took over and it was agreed she would be representing SEFS.

Early in 2009 five priorities were agreed by the Rural Board:

1. Influencing the Regional Architecture to ensure a Rural Focus is embedded in the new regional structure and processes;
2. Getting clear quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate what gives the region a competitive edge;
3. Broadband- The provision of good Broadband in rural areas is regarded as critical, for the rural economy;
4. Sustainable Production and Consumption;
5. Affordable rural housing

Towards the end of 2009, due, unfortunately to the reorganisation and cutbacks in SEEDA the future funding of the Rural Board was discussed and options presented on merging the secretariat with the SE Rural Forum. SEFS supported the merging of the two regional rural organisations.

Environmental Summit

As part of the re-organisation of the region, in summer 2009 SEFS along with GOSE, Natural England and the Environment Agency organised an Environmental Summit. The main outcome of this was the agreement that the region would benefit from a SEFS + type of organisation to champion the cause of environmental sustainability. Throughout the rest of the year SEFS pursued a dialogue with the aim of getting this created. Our efforts however were not successful.

8 SEFS ORGANISATION

Funding

SEFS received the last tranche of two years worth of funding from SEEDA as well as supporting the Behaviour Change work this ensured that SEFS coordination could be maintained until at least March 2010. Sufficient reserves were in place to allow SEFS to continue beyond that at least until March 2011. SEFS focus in discussions on SEFS + as a result of the Environmental Summit was on funding opportunities to support the idea and Lynnette Leeson had various meetings with DEFRA/GOSE and other statutory bodies where she explored this issue. However because of political uncertainty as at the end of March 2010 no new funding opportunities for SEFS or SEFS + were identified.

Financial Management & Employment

Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) has assisted SEFS in managing its finances (since 2003) and employment (since 2004). However at the beginning of last year SWT indicated that they could no longer provide this service. Through 2009/2010 SEFS worked to find a replacement and thanks to the offer of help from the Environment Centre (tEC) in Southampton the Management team successfully transferred Alison's employment and the financial operations from SWT to tEC in December 2009.

11. LOOKING AHEAD SEFS 2010/11

Over the coming year SEFS priorities will be focussed on continuing to provide a strong voice for the environment across the South Eastern Region by:

- Monitoring the changes in the governance and decision making structures of regional and national bodies and local authority alliances.
- Following progress of the development of Local Enterprise partnerships
- Keeping the environment on the agendas of surviving bodies such as the Rural Forum
- Working with other voluntary bodies to ensure the retention and development of an effective environmental network
- Liaising with existing and reformed statutory bodies to ensure sustainability remains high on the agenda
- Submitting comments on government consultation papers
- addressing the financial challenges faced by the organisation
- progressing the dissemination of the Behaviour Change messages

THANKS

SEFS would like to thank:

- 1) All P&EC members past and present for their hard work and dedication to ensuring environmental sustainability is central to regional policy
- 2) Diane Millis as Chair of P&EC, Chris Corrigan as Treasurer & Lynnette Leeson as Chair of SEFS for their work
- 3) Ian Hepburn for his unstinting work as SEFS lead on the South East Plan
- 4) Members for their financial support and input to and backing for our work
- 5) SEEDA for the funding they have provided over the last four years
- 6) Surrey Wildlife Trust for acting as SEFS employer and treasurer and the Environment Centre for taking over this role
- 7) And most importantly of all, Alison Walters for her continued dedication and hard work in the SEFS Secretariat, which remains so vital to our ability to act as an effective and cohesive force and voice for the environment and sustainable development in the South East.