

**Agenda Item No.**

**TO:** SWALE RURAL FORUM  
**DATE:** Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2005  
**SUBJECT:** **Strategy Development – Rural Forum Working Groups**  
**BY:** Community Regeneration Manager  
**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** 'Task and Finish' working groups set up by the Swale Rural Forum were asked to consider the draft consultative economic development and tourism development strategies paying particular attention to the specific issues within the rural areas across the Borough. The combined work of both groups is presented with priority action areas highlighted, which will be incorporated into Action Plans contained within the final strategy documents. This work will be used to support the overall regeneration framework in Swale.

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**Implications:** The Borough Council's own financial position is such that it cannot be assumed priorities identified will necessarily receive funding or 'help in kind'. The need to secure external funding will remain a high priority and this work has already begun with a specific two year funding bid made through Swale's regeneration unit (Swale Forward) to SEEDA's Devolved Delivery Funding programme, the outcome of which is anticipated by the end of December 2005.

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**Decision Required:** Members are asked to consider the report paying particular attention to the notes of the task and finish working groups.

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1. At the meeting of the Swale Rural Forum in August 2005, Members were advised of the publication of two consultative strategies for Economic Development and Tourism Development and the need to consider each document to ensure that rural priorities were recognised in the context of the regeneration agenda. It was agreed that task and finish working groups be established to consider each document and establish priorities for action.
2. Following consultation with the Chairman of the Swale Rural Forum, officers agreed it would be expedient to bring both working parties together on one occasion to discuss both strategies and to agree a common action plan comprising rural priorities. This meeting took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 2005 and the notes of this meeting are annexed for information.
3. The notes reflect broad consensus on priority action areas within the two development strategies; some clearly fall within one discipline rather than the other but there are some areas of commonality. They are:
  - Tourism: Food and Drink (formerly Kentish Fayre and now promoted under Produced in Kent); Tourism Bus; Festivals and Eco-tourism

- Economic Development: Access and accessibility to employment elsewhere; supporting local communities (the provision of local shops and other services in rural communities); accommodation (the need to support local people in the locale)
- Tourism and Economic Development: Generating new types of employment in rural areas to offer choice to rural residents, communities as well as visitors; impact of IT (working from home)

It has not been possible to identify any two specific actions, which should take a higher priority, but, in any event, this will to some extent be driven by the availability of resources.

4. Members are advised that the strategy documents are still out to wider consultation until mid December following which reports will be prepared for the Executive Committee on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006. It is still possible that alternative or indeed, additional priority actions may emerge which will help to inform Action Plans.

5. Members are asked to consider the report paying particular attention to the notes of the task and finish working groups.

Kieren Mansfield  
Economic Development Officer

Lyn Newton  
Tourism Development Officer

November 2005

List of background documents – Notes of Working Group October 2005