

Briefing Note

Councillor John Jowers' attendance at End Conference for the SUSCOD Project

The SUSCOD end conference took place on 6th November 2013 and was held in Amsterdam; The Netherlands. This was the final conference (following 3 regional conferences earlier in the programme) to publish some of the findings of the international activity and formally launch the SUSCOD 'Assistant' (a web-based tool to support coastal practitioners working in the North Sea region).

Councillor John Jowers attended the final conference on the 6th November and then returned to the UK. Officers that have been involved in project delivery (Andrew Cook and Hilary Rowlands) stayed for additional project activity on 7th November.

Essex County Council has been working with international partners to deliver the SUSCOD programme since 2009 and has benefitted from significant international shared learning, as well as finance, to support necessary project delivery within the County.

The end conference was chaired by the SUSCOD Lead Partner; the Province of North Holland, and introductions were given by Joanna Geldhof, Provincial Executive of the 'Water and Wadden Sea' organisation. Councillor John Jowers was introduced to Mrs Geldhof during the conference in order that Essex County Council can continue to consolidate relationships with North Holland. North Holland is a key partner for many of the European programmes and strong relationships are therefore vital to secure joint working going forward. Having an ECC Cabinet Member attend the final conference showed real commitment from the County Council to not only SUSCOD, but European projects in general.

DG Environment addressed the conference to discuss the proposal for a directive to establish a framework for integrated coastal management and maritime spatial planning. It is important for ECC to be involved in these discussions and be aware of current European Directorate-General thinking, in order to ensure that future EU funding applications and activity are relevant and therefore more likely to be approved for funding. A subsequent presentation by the Interreg Joint Technical Secretariat was held regarding future programmes, again providing some insight for future bidding rounds.

A significant part of the conference was set aside for a professor of Change Management to discuss Integrated Coastal Zone (change) Management (ICZM). ICZM was a key component of the SUSCOD programme – ascertaining how coastal practitioners might best ensure that coastal change management is considered holistically. A focused discussion on theories and findings was therefore appreciated by all partners and fed back into the European Secretariat.

The funding for travel and accommodation for the conference was fully met by Essex County Council's commitment within SUSCOD. It is necessary for any European project to have a travel budget, in order to support international partnership working. The match funding which Essex County Council provided for the project was all allocated to previously agreed priority projects for the council in 2008/9 and going forward. These included Harwich public realm works, Walton on the Naze Crag Walk and officer time, for example.

With the future requirement to focus more strongly upon EU funding, given the lack of internal funds, it is necessary to consolidate existing positive partnerships with EU Member States. Essex County Council, through the SUSCOD project, has secured trusted relationships with Dutch, Belgian, Danish, Swedish and Scottish (Fife) partners and Councillor John Jowers' attendance at the end conference for SUSCOD highlighted Essex County Council's commitment to strong international partnership working going forward.