

## WELCOME BACK AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Here at the Essex Rural Partnership we hope you have had a wonderful Christmas and we would also like to thank you for your continued support as we embark on yet another year of interest and opportunities. May I take this opportunity to say we welcome relevant news from you and are very happy to feature it in our monthly bulletin.

### PLEASE BE RESPONSIBLE WHEN DISPOSING OF YOUR TREE



Most people will take their tree down during the first week of January, with some people observing the twelve days of Christmas which means they'll take it down by 6 January.

There are lots of ways you can recycle it:

- **Council collections**  
Lots of councils offer a special tree collection service over the festive period. Check with your local authority or watch out for a leaflet through the door or a sticker on your bin.
- **Compost it**  
If you have a small tree, consider composting it or putting it in your garden waste bin.
- **Recycling centre**  
Your local recycling centre is another good place to get rid of your tree responsibly – check it out before you make the trip.  
Don't forget to remove all decorations and pots before you dispose of your tree!
- **Community collection**  
Find out if your local residents association organises a Christmas tree collection in your street.
- **Get someone else to do it!**  
If you don't have the time (or the inclination) to get rid of your tree, there are companies out there you can pay to not only undress your tree, but will remove it and sweep up the needles too! Find out more information.
- **More information and ideas**  
Visit [Recycle Now](#) for more information on how to recycle your Christmas tree.

What happens to recycled Christmas trees?

Trees are usually shredded into chippings which are then used locally in parks or woodland areas.

## ENGLAND COAST PATH – IMPROVING ACCESS TO THE COAST



Work has started on defining the route of the path which forms part of the coastal margin and has public rights of access along the way. A list is available of 18 dates and venues for the "drop-in" sessions that Natural England has organised to promote the Essex Coastal Path.

The 'drop-in' sessions are for the public and affected landowners to go along and find out, these sessions cover the path from Shotley Gate (on the Suffolk Border) south to Burnham-on-Crouch.

All affected landowners should be receiving letters in the coming week advising them of NE proposals.

For the dates please click [here](#)

Natural England expects to complete work on the England Coast Path in 2020.

## DELIVERING FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

The Government response to the review of rural proofing carried out by an independent team lead by Lord Cameron of Dillington was published on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and can be found [here](#)

In autumn of 2013 the previous government commissioned the review to look at how effectively government departments had adopted and implemented the principles and guidance set out in a package of rural proofing support information issued by Defra in July 2013. The review report was published in January 2015.

The government response will take forward a number of actions to make sure the needs of people living in rural areas are taken properly into account in decision making, and that its residents are given the same opportunities as those based in cities.

## FARMERS TO GET GREEN LIGHT TO MAINTAIN WATERCOURSES



Farmers across England will finally be allowed to maintain their own ditches under government plans to improve flood defences.

Defra secretary Liz Truss was due to make an announcement in a keynote speech to delegates at the Oxford Farming Conference held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016. To be included was the statement that more than 1m acres of prime farmland will be better protected by 2021 through the government's investment in flood defences.

"Subject to parliamentary approval, we will also allow farmers across the country to maintain their own ditches up to 1.5km long from April, so they can clear debris and manage the land."

"This follows the successful pilots we started two years ago."

Farmers are currently unable to remove debris such as silt from ditches without permission.

The ban is backed by some conservationists, who say it encourages wildlife. But farmers have complained that it prevents them from taking simple actions to reduce flooding.

For further information including details on the successful pilot [please click here](#)

Source: FMW website

## **NATION LIVING WAGE WILL PUT RURAL BUSINESSES AT RISK**

There is a perception that businesses have welcomed proposals of a higher wage for their staff, but what of the smaller firms? The introduction of this scheme in April could well affect many small firms, and certain key sectors such as farming and tourism, who are considered to be among the worst affected as labour-intensive trades become increasingly unprofitable.

The Resolution Foundation has published a new report on the impact of the National Living Wage (NLW). The policy, which comes into force in April, will see hourly pay increase to £7.20 this year, edging up to £9 by 2020.

The study is very much based on city locations and highlights certain areas that will be affected more than others where local wages are already low and it will prove a challenge to minimise job losses. The surprising factor is that the rural areas in the UK have not been taken into account, however the findings do indicate that our rural communities will not escape major challenges alongside those with low wages and employment loss in cities due to this scheme.

The logic being that smaller businesses are less likely to benefit from these changes as the cost for businesses is supposed to be offset by reductions in the corporation tax. However if a small business is not incorporated and less likely to be then the tax saving is missed while still having to pay out a higher minimum wage to its employees. Therefore leaving rural employers no choice but to either take a hit on their profits in and some cases break even or much worse or reduce their number of employees.

To read the Resolution Foundation report [Please click here](#)

## **ESSEX ENERGY SWITCH**



Once again Essex County Council (ECC) has organised a collective energy switching initiative for people and businesses who want to cut their energy bills.

Nearly £1million has collectively been saved by Essex residents from the past two switches.

Rather than switching energy providers as an individual customer, (ECC) are offering the service to work together and save money. If you haven't switched for a few years you are

likely to see the biggest savings, but even those who switch regularly can benefit. ECC state that those who took part in the last Essex Energy Switch saved an average of more than £200 and many residents saved even more.

**Residents have until 1 February 2016 to register their interest (without any obligation) in switching their energy supplier through the scheme.**

It's a free, easy and secure way to cut your energy bill without wasting time comparing prices on comparison sites.

You'll be joining forces with thousands of others and taking part in a giant collective 'auction'.

There's no cost to register and there is no cost to switch.

**Anyone who pays an energy bill can take part.**

- As well as homeowners this includes tenants and customers on pre-payment meters.

- You can register for electricity and gas or just for one or the other. The choice is yours.
- Small and medium-sized businesses can also register and we encourage them to do so.

On 12 February 2016 you will receive an email containing a new gas and electricity offer, valid for one month.

For further information about Essex Energy Switch please click [here](#)

Poster details please click [here](#)

### NOT ON A GAS MAIN?

If you're not connected to the mains gas supply it is still possible to save money on heating oil by joining the **Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) community oil buying scheme**.

For further information about the oil buying scheme please click [here](#)

The scheme brings communities together by using joint buying power savings can be passed on directly to people like you whose fuel costs may be high simply because you use oil fired central heating.

It also saves you the time and hassle of telephoning numerous suppliers to obtain quotes for the best price every time you need fuel.



### LEADER UPDATE

The Leader programme for Wool Towns and Heritage Coast areas was launched on 12th January. This means that all 4 Local Action Groups covering Essex are now accepting applications, as Essex Rivers and Eastern Plateau had already opened. The four Local Action Groups cover different parts of the county and for more information about what can be funded, and who to contact for your area, visit [http://www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk/RDPE\\_and\\_LEADER.aspx](http://www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk/RDPE_and_LEADER.aspx)

### CONGRATULATIONS !! – Community Agents Project Scoops Top Award



#### New partnership scoops top award

Community Agents – the county-wide project supporting older people to continue living independently – may only be a year old, but it has scooped a top award for partnership working.

Essex County Council’s ‘You Make the Difference in Essex Awards’ showcases those who work in new, flexible and collaborative ways to achieve the best possible outcomes for people across the county.

Community Agents beat off stiff competition to take the Partnership Award which is voted for by Essex County Council staff.

The project, which started last summer, is an innovative new approach to meeting the care needs of local people, now and in the future.

The Community Agents scheme is funded by Essex County Council and is delivered through a partnership between the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE), British Red Cross, Age UK Essex Neighbourhood Watch and Essex County Council (ECC).

People are referred to the agents from social care, GPs and other healthcare workers, and other community and voluntary sector organisations. Family and friends are also able to refer. The Community Agents help frail older people and their carers to recognise, source and implement solutions to the problems they face, such as mobility, practical living skills, social isolation, personal safety and caring for someone. It does not duplicate existing services, but complements and adds value by linking and aligning with other services and organisations

“We all see the day-to-day positive impact on peoples’ lives and it is wonderful to achieve the recognition that this award brings,” said Andrew Gardner, Chief Executive Age UK Essex on behalf of the Community Project Board.

Cllr Anne Brown, ECC Cabinet Member for Communities and Healthy Living, which includes Community Agents, congratulated the team for taking the award so soon after the project was launched.

“The added value Community Agents bring in supporting older people to continue living independently in their own homes; in the communities they know and love is amazing. It is a wonderful example of voluntary organisations working together with Essex County Council to really make a difference.”

Overall 180 entries were received and a panel of ECC employees whittled these down to a shortlist of 27. The winners were announced in November 2015 at a celebration at Weston Homes Community Stadium in Colchester.

Since July 2014 community agents have supported around 3,550 frail, elderly people and their informal carers across the county to maintain independent living. Quarter of those supported were over the age of 85yrs and over half lived alone. The majority of people said the agents had brought a positive change to their lives or their abilities to cope as a carer. From a sample of 50 people contacted after 3 months, 43 were still living at home, most without any additional support.

As the scheme continues to build on its success, it is looking for volunteers to support their work.

“The role of the volunteer is very rewarding” said Tricia Earp, Area Operations Director, British Red Cross, “so we’d like to hear from compassionate people with a bit of time to spare and an interest in helping older people to live independently. The role is varied and we try to tailor it to suit the volunteer. Some might enjoy accompanying people to social clubs, for example while others might prefer to help with driving. Hours are flexible and we provide full training and support.”

To volunteer with Community Agents Essex call: 01245 291024 or email: [communityagents@redcross.org.uk](mailto:communityagents@redcross.org.uk)

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Rural Community Council of Essex Registered Charity No. 1097009. Company registered in England and Wales No. 4609624