



Essex Rural Partnership, RCCE, Threshelfords Business Park, Inworth Road, Feering, Essex  
CO5 9SE

## **Terms of Reference**

*Version approved 24 February 2009*

1. The partnership will be known as the *Essex Rural Partnership* (ERP).
2. The overall purpose of the ERP will be to agree and deliver a *shared* vision for the future of rural Essex that will support balanced sustainable development that takes account of environmental, community and economic issues. It will facilitate diversification of the economy and provide community, environmental and economic benefits.

The ERP will seek to ensure that the Essex Strategy, Local Area Agreement (LAA) and related action plans are rural-proofed; providing input on rural perspectives of all issues and helping to develop and implement the Community Strategy in the rural context.

3. The ERP will provide a forum for bringing together in partnership the main stakeholders and delivery agencies with responsibility and interests in the rural areas of Essex. Through this forum it will offer an important opportunity to undertake or support lobbying in order to bring Essex and its rural issues to the attention of regional, national and European bodies.
4. Membership shall be open to all such organisations within the county of Essex (including Southend Borough Council and Thurrock Council) that represent stakeholders or delivery agencies at a level that at least encompasses a single district.
5. Organisations that are not currently members of the ERP may apply for membership and, if agreed, join as either full or associate members. Any requests to join will first be considered by the Steering Group. If agreed by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, organisations fulfilling the criteria in paragraph 3. may join immediately. Other organisations may be invited to join as associate members – see paragraph 6.
6. The members, at any meeting of which all members have been notified, shall be able to invite other organisations (including regional or local organisations) to become 'associate' members of the ERP subject to the agreement of two thirds of those members present. Associate members will be eligible to attend ERP meetings for two years. Thereafter they must be invited to re-join using the process as above. Associate members will have no voting rights unless specifically agreed by members at the time of invitation. With this exception, all

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references to members in the following paragraphs shall apply equally to associate members.

7. Member organisations shall be entitled to send to ERP meetings one senior officer representative from each of the functional areas (i.e. broad type of service delivery or interest, for example, economic development, biodiversity, community transport, estate ownership) for which they are responsible. Additional officer representatives will be able to attend by the invitation of the Chairman or administrating body. Elected members or Board members of partner organisations will be welcome to attend.
8. At the request of at least ten member organisations, any decision of the ERP may be taken by a formal postal vote. In such a circumstance, members will have voting powers as follows:
  - County-wide organisations - 7 votes
  - Unitary authorities – 4 votes
  - Organisations representing an area greater than a single District but not conforming to county administrative boundaries – 4 votes
  - District wide organisations – 2 votes
  - Other organisations – as agreed when joining the ERP

It is anticipated that recourse to formal voting will occur only occasionally as the intention is to maintain a consensus amongst the Partners. The voting allocations above will be reviewed annually.

10. The ERP will meet together three times each year. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman may call additional meetings if required, giving at least two weeks notice.
11. In fulfilling its overall purpose, as in 2. above, the role (*see note below*) of the ERP will be:
  - to provide a forum for bringing together in partnership the main stakeholders with responsibility and interests in the rural areas of Essex, to agree a shared vision, and to identify policies, proposals and recommendations for action across a wide range of rural activities.
  - to provide a framework for integrated actions by the partners taking an holistic approach that recognises the interdependence of countryside and town.
  - to share and increase knowledge about rural issues and raise the profile of rural Essex
  - to identify and draw resources into Essex for the benefit of rural areas from regional, national and European sources.
  - to contribute to regional, national and European policy developments, management plan initiatives, and statutory plans, providing a collective voice for rural Essex
  - to act as a co-ordination point for receiving and disseminating information relating to rural economic, environmental and community issues.

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- to ensure linkage with other mechanisms in Essex, EPF, ELGA, LSPs
- to advise and champion the concept and practice of rural proofing of mainstream funding of key organisations.

***Note: the role of the ERP as set out above is taken from the Essex Rural Strategy as approved on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2005***

12. In undertaking these roles the ERP may establish subsidiary groups subject to the agreement of two thirds of members present at the meeting at which the proposal is discussed.
13. The ERP will elect a Chairman to serve for three years and a Vice-Chairman to serve for two years. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman may be re-elected at the expiry of their tenure. In the circumstances of only one candidate being nominated for each post they shall be elected by a simple majority vote of members present at the relevant meeting (all members having been given at least 14 days notice of such an election). If more than one candidate is nominated for each post, the voting procedure as in 8. shall apply.
14. The activities of the ERP will be managed by a Steering Group comprising senior officers and/or elected representatives or Board members of constituent organisations. Membership of the Steering Group will be agreed annually by the ERP at its first meeting of the calendar year.
15. The Steering Group will comprise:
  - Two members representing business and the rural economy
  - Two members representing environmental interests
  - Two members representing community interests
  - Two local authority representatives (elected by ELGA)
  - As ex-officio members, all Essex-based members of the East of England Rural Forum
  - As associate members, a representative from GO-East and EEDA
  - As associate members, a representative from both Essex County Council and Rural Community Council of Essex (as the bodies responsible for administration of the Partnership)

If subsidiary groups exist to focus on thematic issues (community, economy and environment), then the Steering Group members representing each of the three themes above will be nominated by the appropriate subsidiary group and agreed by the ERP as in paragraph 13. above. The two local authority representatives will be nominated by the Essex Local Government Association. Should the Chairman and/or Vice-Chairman not be appointed as members of the Steering Group by the above process they will, nevertheless, automatically be members of the Steering Group.

16. Elected members or members of Boards of partnership organisations may be accompanied by an officer of the appropriate organisation at Steering Group meetings. Such officers shall be entitled to speak at meetings but shall not be entitled to participate in decision making.

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17. The Steering Group will meet immediately following each ERP meeting and also on three intervening dates between ERP meetings (i.e. at two monthly intervals). The Essex Rural Partnership and its Steering Group will be facilitated by Rural Community Council of Essex (in accordance with a Service Level Agreement with Essex County Council).
18. The purpose of the Steering Group will be to:
  - maintain the momentum of the ERP;
  - endorse and support priority actions and funding bids to respond to identified issues;
  - exert influence locally, regionally and nationally;
  - nominate a representative to attend the Regional Rural Affairs Forum
  - liaise with, and nominate a representative to, the Sustainable Essex Partnership
  - on the advice of any subsidiary groups, influence Partners to remedy poor co-ordination or overlapping functions;
  - on the recommendation of any subsidiary groups, co-ordinate and support lobbying.
19. At ERP meetings, the presence of representatives from a minimum of ten partner organisations shall render the meeting quorate.
20. At Steering Group meetings the presence of four members including the Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall render the meeting quorate.