



Essex Rural Partnership

ERP Full Partnership Meeting Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th September 2009 10.00 am, The Salings Millennium Hall, Great Saling

Present:

JJ	John	Jowers	Chair ERP Essex County Council
JB	John	Brown	ERP Vice Chair CofE / RCCE / RCCE
RA	Rosemary	Alexander	Farm Crisis Network
Pba	Peter	Baggott	EALC/ENvAG
AB	Angie	Balcome	Essex County Council/ Making the Links
SB	Simon	Banks	Essex County Council
KiBa	Kitty	Barrett	Braintree District Council
EB	Ed	Bennett	Haven Gateway
KBI	Keith	Blackburn	Essex County Council
JB	Jackie	Brown	RRAVS
Jbu	John	Buchanan	EALC
Jc	John	Carr	Essex and Southend Links (W Esx Locality)
KC	Keith	Cheeseman	Essex County Council (Community Well Being)
PC	Peter	Chillingworth	LGA
PCr	Pam	Crewes	MOAT Housing Resident Group
KC	Kate	Crofts	Essex Partnership/ Essex County Council
KE	Ken	Edwards	Active Chelmsford
JG	Judy	Gray	Essex County Council
EG	Ed	Gregory	Essex County Council
JH	John	Hall	EWT
PH	Paul	Harris	Maldon District Community Transport
SH	Suzanne	Harris	RCCE
KH	Keith	Hughes	Business Link
AJ	Alison	Jennings	IN-Tend
CK	Caroline	Kay	MOAT Housing
SK	Steve	Kilcoyne	Mid Essex Police
GK	Geoffrey	King	Essex Disabled People's Association
PM	Pooneeta	Mahadeo	Essex County Council
SN	Sue	North	ESTIC (Essex and Southend Infrastructure Consortium)
MP	Mick	Page	Essex County Council
RP	Rosemary	Padfield	Essex NFU
DP	Dominic	Petre	EET
AP	Amanda	Plummer	Project Coordinator - RCCE / Ashlyns Organics Ltd
RP	Rachael	Price	Essex County Council
WS	Wendy	Scattergood	LGA/ Braintree District Council
JSh	Joy	Sheppard	Essex Association of Local Councils
SSh	Sue	Sheppard	RCCE
DS	Darren	Smart	Essex County Council
RS	Richard	Stark	Ashlyns Organics Limited
PW	Paul	Williams	Essex County Council
EW	Ewan	Wilson	Essex Police
PhW	Philip	Wilson	Essex County Council
RW	Richard	Woolley	Rural Community Council of Essex
TW	Tony	Wright	East of England Ambulance User Group

In Attendance

KM Kirsty Monk Rural Community Council of Essex

Apologies

JC	Judy	Cuddeford	BDVSA
DE	David	Eniffer	Volunteer Bureau Tendring
WJ	Wendy	Jackson	ECC
PM	Pauline	Mann	Tendring CT
PMu	Paul	Murphy	Maldon CVS
MR	Melanie	Rundle	Colchester Borough Council Warm Homes Project
PS	Phil	Smith	Rural Shops Alliance
KT	Kelly	Tarling	VAEF
CA	Chris	Allen	East of England Development Agency
IW	Iain	Wicks	Federation of Small Businesses
JM	Jayne	Mason	South West Essex PCT
MH	Mike	Hall	Assoc of Universities in East of England
CR	Chris	Rust	Maldon DC
NS	Nick	Shuttleworth	Rural Community Council of Essex
NL	Nicola	Larkin	Barleylands Farm and Visitor Centre
JC	Jill	Curd	Essex Community Foundation
PCol	Pris	Colchester	Farm Crisis Network
MW	Mavis	Webster	RCCE
AL	Andrew	Lowing	Rochford District Council
RWh	Richard	Whetton	Rochford District Council
KBr	Keith	Brown	Federation of Small Businesses
PBlA	Peter	Blackman	Essex and Southend LINK Countywide Group
SC	Sue	Cornwell	Colchester BC Warm Homes Project Officer
LB	Lee	Batson	Ecunimical Churches Officer Together
SSu	Sue	Sumner	CVS Uttlesford
MW	Marilyn	Williams	PALS (NHS)

Welcome and Introductions

Act:

Chairman Cllr. John Jowers welcomed all to the meeting.

JJ felt that interesting and changing times were ahead due to the imminent demise of the Regional Assemblies and the likelihood that there will be a shake up of the Regional Development Agencies.

There was also the launch of the Essex Rural Commission Report on Friday 11th September (Maldon) which the ERP has had a two way relationship, feeding into it and from it into the new ERP Essex Rural Strategy.

It was vital that the Essex Rural Partnership seize this window of opportunity and it was its duty to express rural issues and the needs and wishes of rural communities through the new ERP Essex Rural Strategy to help shape the new political and strategic landscape.

Apologies were taken as read. (Please see above for details).

1 Minutes of the previous meeting 15th May 2009 & matters arising.

No matters of accuracy were raised

Those present agreed the minutes.

Matters Arising were dealt with in the main agenda items.

2 Presentation : The Rural Economy in Essex

Ed Bennett , Rural Business Advisor Haven Gateway /Essex County Council

(A full electronic copy of this presentation is available on the ERP Website www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk).

EB briefly outlined his role as advisor/ consultant on rural affairs and business development, working with Essex County and Council and Haven Gateway.

EB explained that the rural agri-economy was competing in a volatile and changing market place, where sudden downward turn in prices made it difficult for farmers to budget long term and narrowed profit margins.

EB felt that eastern eating habits were shifting to western tastes for meat and wheat products which could lead to increased demand in the future on supplies; this may well mean that future demand for crops will outstrip supply.

However farmers were currently facing a drop in crop prices of up to £70 per tonne and Bio fuel crop prices had dropped to around £212.00 per tonne, although export of livestock had was up due to the weak pound. As well as this oil prices had risen and the high price was affecting food production costs. Alternative sources of income such as agri-tourism needed to be developed and diversification of redundant buildings promoted. Agricultural land prices had also increased significantly.

The Rural Recession impacts:

- Job Losses - rise in number of highly skilled people made unemployed
- Increase in travel costs
- Housing availability – lack of affordable housing for agricultural workers
- Local facilities closing.

EB explained that the average agricultural worker earned around £22-24,000 a year and had a high skills set, with excellent budgeting, finance and land management/conservation skills; however the average age was 56, there was a concern that there was not enough young people coming into the industry.

EB advised that grant funding Grant Aid for Business was available from various sources (please see presentation for details).

EB encouraged members to work together to make rural communities in Essex viable, sustainable and thriving.

Discussion and Questions:

Q: JB asked whether take up rates for agricultural courses at Writtle College had improved.

A: RP (NFU) Replied that the uptake was larger than it had been for many years. Unfortunately the engineering course had to be terminated 2 years ago due to lack of numbers.

RW referred to the EERF paper on the rural economy and felt that it was important to put across a broader definition of the rural economy, which now encompassed a wide range of skills, technologies, products and services. Rural communities must also be able to attract in young people and young families to bring in skills and sustain numbers and community viability, affordable housing was only part of the issue in making this happen.

KC felt that it may be a good idea to see if the Essex Apprentice scheme (which is to shortly be launched) could be tailored to be suitable for rural apprenticeship.

PC: asked EB whether the loss of migrant workers returning home has impacted on the agricultural sector as it has done in the East Anglian region.

EB: replied that there had been an impact due to the new Home Office Regulations for migrant workers and the improving economies in Europe and weak pound had meant a return back for some workers especially from the Polish Communities.

Action: EB to send JC a copy of his presentation. KM to forward.

EB /KM

3 Presentation: What Business Link Does in Essex -Keith Hughes, Partnership Director, Business Link

(A full electronic copy of this presentation is available on the ERP Website www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk).

KH gave a brief overview of the role of Business link and its activities within the region. Business Link covers 6 counties, has 13 centres, 3 of which are in Essex. Essex holds a 26% share of all businesses in the region. Business Link has advisors, specialists, information experts and partnership directors and website. They offer a number of services such as business start up support, information, workshops and guidance, business health checks, funding and grants, anonymous helpline, advice on growing a business, to name but a few.

KH reported that Job Centre Plus has taken on 160 extra staff in Essex to cope with the rise in footfall. As the number of redundancies had risen and these included highly skilled workers (perhaps with redundancy money); in partnership with Business Link, Job Centre plus were now suggesting small business “start up” as another option to suitable candidates.

4 **Presentation: Local Area Agreement – Forthcoming Consultations**

Kate Crofts, Essex Partnership Manager, Essex County Council

KC outlined the current review and refresh process of the Local Area Agreement 2 (LAA) (lifespan 2008 – 2011). The LAA is being scrutinised and refreshed to respond to current issues and in response to data already received regarding outcomes. A refreshed hardcopy of the LAA2 will be available soon. The Essex Strategy is the tapestry which aims to weave together and depict the numerous threads of partnership priorities.

During the review process, a series of seven consultation evenings or summits for the public on identified priority themes were to be held – details of the summits were circulated to members.

Q. KE asked if input from the bottom up was used such as Community Led Plans (CLP).

A. KC replied that during the review all existing CLP had been fed upward into this process, a bottom up approach had been used so that the Essex Partnership can pick up as many of these “threads” in the Essex Strategy as possible.

5 **Presentation: The Essex Compact**

Simon Banks, Community Planning and Public Engagement, Essex County Council

SB reported that the purpose of the Essex Compact is to guide and encourage statutory agencies such as local councils and the voluntary and community sector in working together fairly and productively to improve the well-being of people living and working in Essex. It sets out an agreement to principles and standards for a good, open, fair relationship between statutory and voluntary agencies.

There are 3 tiers of Compact, National, County and District level. SB stressed that this is not a hierarchy and the smallest compact carries as much authority as the biggest. The Essex County Compact consists of a core statement and four more specific codes of practice on Funding and Procurement, Volunteering, Public Engagement and Marginalised Groups

SB advised that to sign up to the Essex Compact or for further information please contact Simon Banks at Essex County Council on 01245 430478 or by e-mail: simon.banks@essex.gov.uk

A short 20 minute interval was held for refreshments 11.45 am to 12.10pm

6 **Report from the East of England Rural Forum (EERF) -Suzanne Harris (RCCE)**

SH reported that the most recent EERF Forum meeting in had taken place in Swaffham, Norfolk which focused on “access” as its theme. It highlighted good practice in the form of a transport scheme aimed at 16-18 year olds which “bused in” students to Eastern College.

The next meeting of the EERF is due to be held on Wednesday 16 September 2009, Newmarket, theme Health.

SH reported that the EERF Steering group meeting had announced the commencement of a process to develop a Rural White Paper for the region (essentially a Regional Rural Strategy). The new ERP Strategy will feed into this document.

Further information/ papers regarding the above meetings can be found on the EERF website: www.eerf.org.uk

7 **Report from the ERP Steering Group -Suzanne Harris RCCE**

SH reported that the principle purpose of the ERP Steering Group Meeting in July had to discuss and forward the work on the Draft Strategy.

Draft of the Revised Essex Rural Strategy – presentation

Suzanne Harris - RCCE

SH reported that we had learnt some lessons since the previous ERP Strategy was launched in July 2005. It was hoped this strategy would be launched in November 2009 with a Strategy lifespan from 2010 – 2015 and a Vision lifespan from 2010 – 2020.

Specific references to policies, strategies, bodies that may no longer be in existence by the end of the lifespan of the Strategy, have not been referenced in this Strategy, so as not to date it. (These will be referenced and refreshed as necessary on the ERP website).

The Forward shows a positive overview of what Essex offers and sets the context and the reason why a Rural Strategy is needed. It has a refreshed vision statement and outlines 6 strategic aims determined by the earlier consultation process with members and stakeholder organisations.

New Strategy Vision: To create a vibrant future for rural Essex, based upon 6 Strategic Aims:

- Active and Caring Communities
- Improved Access to Services
- Greater Availability of Affordable Housing
- A Thriving Economy
- A Rich and Varied Environment
- A Flexible Planning and Policy Framework

New ERP Strategy Role:

- To raise the profile of rural Essex
- To identify priorities for partnership members
- To inform future strategies
- To encourage partners to work together towards a shared vision and aims
- To offer evidence and support for applications for funding for the benefit of rural Essex

Delivery

Where practical and desirable, the objectives of this Strategy will be developed into Action Plans with specific timetables and targets. With the agreement of partners, these actions will be led by named organisations, and the activities to achieve the objectives will be overseen by Action Groups and by the Steering Group.

It is hoped that the format of the three Action Groups will remain, with three foci on Community, Economy and Environment – the latter also giving consideration to coastal issues. These Action Groups will meet both individually and collectively to best address the needs of specific issues. The role of the Action Groups will be to monitor progress, encourage added value through joint working and to collectively promote the Essex Rural Partnership's Strategy and Vision. Members of the Action Groups will also be members of the full Essex Rural Partnership.

JB felt it important that we ensure that the agenda followed by the action groups delivers the “nitty gritty” of the action plan and they get things done.

Action: Steering Group to discuss the Action Groups and Action Plan.

SH advised that feedback on the draft received to date had been positive with around 87.3 % of respondents mostly happy with the draft.

SG

SH invited the members present to comment on the draft.

PC felt that the new Strategy has to be flexible to take on board new possibilities – such as Harwich as a new tourist cruise destination.

PW felt that in the “A Thriving Economy” section needed stronger emphasis on skills and training and highlighted that nothing was shown on this issue under potential solutions, as this is a key issue it should be addressed in this section also.

JH: felt that the A Rich and Varied Environment Section had perhaps lost something in the editing process and the link between diversity sites and production of local food needed to be re-established.

Action: JH and SH to liaise re this section.

Proposal:

Chair, John Jowers asked if ERP Members present were happy with the basic ideas, vision statement and strategies set out in the Draft Strategy. The Chair then motioned a proposal to allow the current Draft to go to wider consultation for the next 3 weeks. JH/SH

Vote:

The Membership present agreed the proposal unanimously.

8 Presentation: Ashlyns (Organic) Training -Can Cook Will Cook Project
Amanda Plummer, Project Coordinator , Rural Community Council of Essex

(A full electronic copy of this presentation is available on the ERP Website www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk).

AP reported on a new project funded by Big Lottery money, run in partnership with Ashlyns Training School and RCCE.

The Can Cook Will Cook project will work with families who have poor basic skills or other social disadvantages. Workshops will develop skills in numeracy and literacy while sharing knowledge about cookery and nutrition and having fun in the process. A trained chef (Richard Stark) will lead cookery courses in the up to date Ashlyns training kitchen, in schools and at community venues. Helps to meet many of the "Every Child Matters" outcomes.

AP asked members for their help to get involved in identifying communities that needed help, sourcing/ providing transport to training events, partnership working and providing funding.

9 Dates of Future Meetings

11th September 2009 launch of the Essex Rural Commission Report, Promenade Walk, Maldon

24th November 2009, launch of the Essex Rural Partnership Strategy, Ingatestone Hall, Brentwood
-final details to be confirmed.

10 Date of Next Essex Rural Full Partnership Meeting

10th March 2010, Marks Tey Parish Hall, (9.30am Registration, 10am Meeting Commences, followed by a buffet lunch at 1.15 pm)

Meeting concluded 1.30 pm