



Essex Rural Partnership

Essex Rural Partnership Full Membership Meeting Minutes of the Meeting held on

Wednesday 12th September 2007
10 am - 1.00 pm
High Barn – Great Bardfield

Present:

Chair - Peter Martin (PM)	Vice Chair – John Brown (JB)
New Chair – John Jowers (JJ)	Mick Page – EERF (MP)
Terry Taber – FSB (TT)	John Hall– EWT (JH)
Wendy Scattergood – ELGA (WS)	Michael Porter (MPO)
Philip Wilson ECC- PIW	Peter Chillingworth -CBC (PEC)
Nick Shuttleworth – RCCE (NS)	Geoff Wilkinson – ECC (GW)
Rosemary Alexander (FCN) RA	Paul Williams ACL (PW)
Dominic Petre (DP)	
Pris Colchester Farm Crisis Network FCN (PC)	Jenny Salisbury ECC Library Services (JES)
Suzanne Roast - RCCE (SR)	Mr Colchester – (FCN)
Ed Gregory- ECC (EG)	Minutes -Kirsty Monk (KM)

Apologies:

Dianne Hardy – Exdra (DH)	Chris Philpot- Barleylands (CP)
Chris Allen –EEDA (CA)	Gemma Driscoll ECC GD
Sandy Cruickshank -Go East (SC)	Peter Baggott - EALC (PB)
Jane Cryer –EET (JC)	Clive Mardiner - EREC (CM)
Alistair Pollock - Thames Gateway South Essex (AP)	Melanie Rundle -CDC (MR)
Anthony Shelton- Age Concern Essex (AS)	Geoffrey King – EDAL (GK)
Linda Smart ECC (LS)	Sue Sumner Uttlesford CVS
Joy Sheppard- EALC (JS)	Yvonne Layton ECC (YL)
Richard Woolley – RCCE (RW)	Kitty Barrett - BDC (KB)
Mavis Webster RDC (MW)	Wendy Jackson – ECC (WJ)
Alex Butler-Zagni NFU (ABZ)	Rachel Payne – ACRE (Cambs) (RP)
Kathryn Berry (Sports Essex) (KAB)	Suzanne Rom – RDC (SR0M)

Mike Hall – Writtle College (MH)

Diana Cross – Z bikes (DC)

Anthony Buston – ECC (AB)

Dan Gascoyne – ECC (DG)

Keith Lawson – ECC (KL)

Theresa Coyne- TC

Steve Brewers – Environment Agency (SB)

Cllr. Roger Walters –ECC

Phil Smith -RSA (PS)

Judy Cuddeford BDVSA (JC)

Chris Allen EEDA (CA)

Linda Smart ECC LS

Brenda Towle

Neil Keylock ECC (NK)

1 **Chairman's Introduction**

Peter Martin (Chairman) welcomed and thanked all for attending the meeting. The apologies were taken as read.

Election of New Essex Rural Partnership Chairman.

PM explained to the members present that his portfolio would be moving away from rural affairs and he was therefore resigning his Chairmanship. The Rural Affairs Portfolio would now be taken over by Cllr. John Jowers. PM advised members that the last meeting of the Essex Rural Partnership (ERP) Steering Group, they had proposed John Jowers as a candidate for the ERP Chair. PM asked members if there were any further candidates for the Chairmanship to be brought forward. No further candidates were submitted.

PM asked for a show of hands as to the election of John Jowers as the new ERP Chairman (wef 12/09/07).

The ERP Membership approved the election of John Jowers as Chairman, with no objections.

PM then handed over Chairmanship to John Jowers (JJ)

Opening Remarks form the new ERP Chair

JJ thanked Peter Martin for his solid, quiet, steady, informed support on rural issues in Essex and that the Essex Rural Partnership owed a debt of gratitude to Peter for his work and commitment.

JJ thanked the membership for electing him Chair and explained that on a County level, awareness of areas of rural deprivation and the great need to highlight rural issues had been identified, especially as rural problems are often not given enough attention due to a general political bias towards urban concerns. Highlighting rural needs and issues in the Local Development Framework, Local Area Plans and Local Strategic Plans would be key to future County strategic planning and requires input from the ERP.

PIW advised that the injection of money via the communities initiative fund and the devolvement of power from Government to communities/ Parishes, which allows them to determine what their budget is spent on, rather than Government deciding it for them,

will have great political benefits and will benefit communities.

Regional Economic Strategy

PIW advised members that the Regional Economic Strategy has not competently reflected rurality in the East of England and has given it very little attention generally throughout the document. ECC and The ERP were to strongly respond to the RES document.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting, 16/05/07 & matters arising

No matters of accuracy were raised

The minutes were then agreed by those present.

The following were reported as updates/ matters arising from those minutes;

Item 10, PIW advised that a climate change summit was due to be held the next day on 13/09/07.

Further matters arising were covered within the main agenda items.

3 Presentation –“ Farming Crisis Network” (FCN) by Pris Colchester FCN

PC explained that she and her husband and sons were all farmers and due to a growing need identified in the farming community, they had set up the Farm Crisis Network in 1998 in the Suffolk area. This had recently expanded to Essex and they had a one new volunteer dealing with the whole Essex area single handed; and she was consequentially very overstretched. They have currently 97 ongoing cases in the Suffolk area and 57 cases in Essex.

Background to the FCN

The Farm Crisis Network is a network of volunteer groups drawn from the farming community and rural churches. FCN volunteers are there to “walk with” and support farming people and families as they seek to resolve their problems. FCN is a member of Mind’s rural network and has worked with rural mind for over 12 years. The work of FCN was established 12 years ago in response to high suicide levels in farming. The problems and strains that farming people face are many and complex: long working hours, increasing isolation, financial problems and stress caused by regulation (such as trading standards inspections) are some examples. Many farm and businesses are entwined with the farm household and family, which can create additional complexities when problems arise.

FCN encounters farming people with mental health issues every day in its work. Depression and mental health issues features in 20-25% of all FCN cases. Calls for help to the FCN helpline have risen by over 60% in the last year. FCN have a wide range of expertise and training as with as many links and contacts with local forms of support, professionals, charities, farm business advisors, debt councillors, farming organisations and local churches. The volunteer remains in contact with the farmer and their family for as long as they wish help. As a Christian organisation, faith was the foundation for the forming o the FCN and they provide an important service to all the farming community whether they have faith or not.

(the FCN helpline is available 7am – 11.pm daily on 07002 326 326 and for more information contact www.fcn.org.uk)

John Jowers thanked Pris Colchester for her very moving and informative presentation on a harrowing aspect of rural life that is often ignored.

PM said that he was sure that the Essex Rural Partnership would like to give assistance to the FCN and the Members agreed to approach FCN after the meeting to ask how they might help.

PEC applauded the work of the FCN which had been made worse by the changing complexion of rural areas and the increasing feeling of isolation by farmers. Better education was needed to make communities understand this and reduce social exclusion.

Action: NS suggested that the ERP and the individual member organisations could help to get further volunteers through their networks and contacts. NS/PM/
JJ/SR

4 Presentation –“Year of Food and Farming” (YoFF) by Michael Porter, Porter Agriculture, Committee Member for YoFF Essex (full copy of the presentation available on request).

MP advised the meeting that the Year of Food and Farming (YoFF) is a national campaign to promote healthy living by giving young people direct experience of food, farming and the countryside.

MP is a member of the Essex YoFF planning committee and CERA (Centre for Environment and Rural Affairs) at Writtle College were facilitating YoFF for the East of England. the national launch event was today at High Grove (prince Charles is the Patron of YoFF) The key date for Essex was 1st May 2008; this will be held at Writtle College, 3000 key stage 2 primary school children have been invited to attend this YoFF educational event. Over 1000 have already confirmed their attendance.

The East of England Launch was due to take place at Wimpole Home Farm - Wednesday 19th September

Aims of YoFF

The aims of the Year of Food and Farming were to give children the opportunity to:

- find out how food is grown and produced
- explore the importance of food
- make informed choices about healthy eating
- experience what the countryside can offer
- Learn more about environmental issues linked to food and the countryside.
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The YoFF website was also being launched today The website will support giving children direct experience of growing, cooking and seeing food produced by connecting schools and organisations

(www.yearoffoodandfarming.org.uk)

SR explained that many regular ERP members were attending the Highgrove National launch of the Year of Food and Farming today (12/09/07).

Members held a general discussion and felt that family life and links in rural communities had led to a form of disconnection and lack of understanding of food production, nutrition and rural life. The ERP wished to support the YoFF and offered there assistance.

Action: KM to circulate YoFF presentation

KM

5 East of England Regional Forum (EERF) Representative.

John Hall was re-elected as ERP representative on Eastern Region Rural Forum (EERF) for a further 2 year period at our last meeting in May, however due to increasing commitments, JH explained he will be standing down as EERF ERP Representative.

Topics from previous EERF meeting:

- Health in Rural Communities
- Rural Environment
- Release of Land - affordable housing and planning
- Sub Groups working on learning and skills groups
- Sub Group Market Towns (local produce – local markets)
- New Chair John Yates took over.
- Flood management
- Water Conservation
- Green Space Planning

JH invited Soapbox items to take forward to the EERF.

None were raised.

Action: ERP Steering Group to consider the appointment of a new EERF ERP Rep.

JJ/JB

The meeting adjourned for 25 minutes for refreshments

6 Reports from the ERP Steering Group and Action Groups:

Brief written reports by Suzanne Roast (SR) and Peter Baggott (PB) regarding the Environmental Group (please see below), ERP Steering Group, ERP CAG Group were circulated to the meeting:

ERP Steering Group (SR) – 1st August 2007

- Topics discussed:
- ERP Website and promotional material
- Regional Rural Forum
- Year of Food and Farming
- Post Offices
- Rural Retail Project
- RDA's
- Standards Report Received

Action: ERP to evolve closer ties with Suffolk and Norfolk and create counterpoint to RDA's and EEDA

ERP Community Action Group (SR) – 5th September 2007

- Topics Discussed
- Rural Crime and Fear of Crime
- Community Leadership
- Post Office Closures

Six Counties Meeting (SR) :- 7th September 2007

- Topics Discussed
- Post Offices
- Planning Policy and Diversification (inconsistencies in interpretation)
- Sustainability of County Forums/Partnerships,
- RDPE Leader
- Rural Deprivation Research – RIS

Rural Retail Development Research Project – 1st August 2007

- 6 month research post advertised. Interview held post holder appointed.
- Steering Group to be formed: RCCE, ECC, Rural Shops Alliance; Federation of Small Businesses; Business Link, Braintree District Council.

Economic Action Group (PIW)

PIW explained that there was good progression on all priorities. Topics discussed:

- Rural Retail Shops
- Planning
- Diversification
- Working Group set up with the Essex Planning association
- Migrant Workers – help with English skills
- GIS - areas of Deprivation Mapping of Essex

ERP Environmental Action Group (PB Written Report Highlights) – 5th July 2007

Since the last ERP report, the Environmental group has met twice. Brief notes are shown below:

Sustainable Procurement Drive

- All central government departments to be carbon neutral by 2012
- 75% of waste recycled
- Waste reduced by 25%
- Water consumption reduced by 25%
- Increase energy efficiency by 30% per sq mtr.

Essex Rural Strategy – Annual Review

The discussion was mainly concerned with performance against the group's key priorities:

- Climate Change Agenda
- Biodiversity
- Rural Regeneration

Environment Group members responsibilities were defined as

1. Awareness raising
2. Development of clear consistent messages
3. Lobbying

A detailed evaluation of how the group's actions fitted within the key priorities was reviewed.

Biodiversity

An update was given on the current status of the Essex Biodiversity project. The groups aim is:

“To protect, conserve and enhance the variety of wildlife species and habitats in Essex through the successful implementation of the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan” The

project is an informal partnership of more than 40 organisations and covers currently 28 species and 15 habitats.

Workshop 24th August 2007

Refreshments were then served from 11.30am -12.00pm.

7 Workshops to discuss future ERP priorities:

JJ explained that it had been 2 years since the priorities had been established and the ERP Essex Rural Strategy published. It was time to review the tasks on the action plan and reprioritise, add or remove that action plan (ERSAP).

The members disbursed into small workshop groups (full details of this workshop will be available for review before the next full ERP meeting in January)

Key ERSAP Workshop Suggestions:

- Lobbying by the ERP given a raised profile.
- Helping Parishes to receive funding to determine their own priorities for how their money is spent –to set their own action plans.
- New actions incorporated into the ERSAP to focus on farming, agriculture and rural diversification
- Rural Tourism – more cross action group working on areas, which fall in to all three areas.
- Strong ERP representation and input into the Local Development Frame Work, Local Area Agreements and LSP's are key.
- Closer working with the Commission for Rural Communities on rural affairs –
- Response by the ERP to the Regional Economic Strategy (RES)
- Use GIS deprivation study and Rural Services Study to lobby and further develop the ERSAP.

8 Rural Post Offices Update – Suzanne Roast (RCCE)

Post Offices

Update 12 September 2007

SR reported that the ERP Post Office working group had taken a number of positive actions to help and advise communities in Essex facing Post Office closures in the Post Office Limited Network Change Programme. Essex was taking a lead on this issue nationally. (Please see below).

- Poster sent to all Parish/Town Councils in Essex – *Copies available at ERP meeting*
- Poster accompanied by 2-page briefing
- ERP website www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk updated with dedicated Post Offices page – poster and briefing available to download by all
- Dates released for consultation, by constituency (month only)

- Most of Essex October 2007, as expected
- Maps created by Essex County Council, plotting PO locations
- RCCE starting work on information/support packs
- Poster version 2 (with dates) printed, ready to send at appropriate time
- Planned template letter with advice on issues to consider – to be posted on website once consultations underway
- Next meeting early October, to coincide with announcement of closures

WS was concerned that none parished areas would not get support.

SR would include information to town, parish district and borough councillors on this issue.

Clarification received from PO Ltd that:

Information is available on proposed consultation dates of each Area Plan, including a list by constituency, at the Network Change Programme website at www.postoffice.co.uk/networkchange

The location of new and proposed Post Office branches will be based upon the government minimum access criteria. In postcode districts where we do not currently meet the access criteria the area plan proposals will include the establishment of new outreach sites.

Additionally, the following sentence would imply that outreach funding support is still tbc; and that its use will be restricted:

The 1.7bn funding package (subject to EU state aid approval) to 2011, is to support the necessary changes to the network to put it on a more stable footing and to provide continuing support for the social network.

9 LEADER– Suzanne Roast (RCCE)

SR explained that the Essex had not qualified 6 years ago for RDPE project monies, however this time Essex had qualified and had been invited to offer expressions of interest by early December 2007. A presentation and discussion of possible projects was due to be held on 17 October 2007. Sr invited any interested parties to contact her if they wished to attend the meeting.

Leader Overview

- Part of the (RDPE) Rural Development Programme for England
- An approach to delivery
- A community based 'bottom up' approach that provides opportunities for local communities to identify their needs and devise appropriate, sustainable solutions
- An integrated element of the new Rural Development Programme

National Leader Criteria:

- Emphasis on integrated and sustainable development
- Coherence of the area
- Quality and realism of plans
- Commitment to collaboration and innovation
- Quality of administration proposals
- Fit with regional and national strategies

Other Factors

- Programme require £ 500,000 match funding from the private sector
- Launch in Essex delayed by EEDA
- Implications for cross border working, however Kent have already submitted their expressions of interest and Essex have lost an opportunity to work with them

JJ felt that quick action was required to catch up with work done in other areas of the region so that Essex does not miss any further opportunities.

Action: Leader Meeting Details to be circulated to relevant parties

KM/SR

10 Soapbox

No items were raised

11 AOB

Rural Summit - 3rd December 2007 Reid Rooms Margaret Roding 6.30pm

12 Date of next full Essex Rural Partnership Meeting

The next full ERP Partnership meeting was agreed to be held on *16th January 2008, 9.30 am registration, meeting commences 10.00 am , Reid , Reid Rooms, Marks Hall, Margaret Roding, followed by a buffet Lunch. (The ERP Steering Group Meeting commences at 2.00pm).*

Meeting concluded: 1.15 pm