



DEFRA FUNDING 'MAKES REAL DIFFERENCE'

A £2.23m Defra support package enabled rural communities to lever in additional funding of £9.03m to benefit local residents, says a report.

Published by the rural charity Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), the 'Making a Difference' report assesses the impact of Defra funding the ACRE network during 2014/15.

For a copy of the report please [click here](#)

It reveals that Defra's investment during the year enabled a further £9.03m to be levered in from a range of local and national sources. The ACRE Network, including 38 rural community councils, encompasses representing 11,000 rural communities across England. The document comes as ACRE awaits a Defra decision on future funding.

It says Defra's £2.23m funding package during 2014/15 enabled ACRE members to support rural communities across England in six key areas.

- * Broadband
- * Rural transport
- * Affordable housing
- * Neighbourhood planning
- * Rural community buildings
- * Community energy

Richard Quallington, ACRE's interim chief executive, said: "This funding has helped to ensure that the rural voice is heard in local and national decision-making. Through our network, we have been able to provide intelligence on the impact of government policy in rural areas, representing 11,000 grassroots communities".

The report showcased best practice examples of community-led solutions to local challenges and explained how the network was sharing learning on sustainable funding models.

For further reading please [click here](#)

Source: Rural Service Network Written by Ruralcity Media

healthwatch
Essex **FEED BACK SERVICE**

A feedback service has been launched by Healthwatch Essex, enabling people to share their views about hospitals and hospices in Essex and read about the experiences of others. Additional health and social care services such as GPs, pharmacies and care homes will be added in coming months.

Healthwatch Essex will publish reviews and encourage services to put local people at the heart of decision making. This is an opportunity to share your experiences of health and social care in Essex, by leaving a review for a hospital, hospice or emergency care service.

To find out more and leave a review on the Healthwatch Essex website please [click here](#)
Simply search for the service by name or location, complete the online form and click submit.

PLANNING REVIEW TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

The government has launched a planning review it hopes will boost productivity in the countryside. The Rural Planning Review will look to reduce regulatory burdens in support of new homes, jobs and innovation. Rural entrepreneurs and housebuilders are being asked to suggest how the planning system can better support rural life. Government ministers then hope to make it simpler for them to expand their businesses and to build much needed new homes.

The government says this will build on the success of the 2014 changes which have seen more than 2,000 agricultural buildings being allowed to be converted to much-needed homes.

Published by Defra and the Department for Communities and Local Government, the review is described as the "latest milestone" in the delivery of the government's Rural Productivity Plan.

The plan sets out new measures to boost the rural economy by investing in education and skills, improving infrastructure and connectivity, and simplifying planning laws for rural businesses and communities.

The government says it is already delivering on these objectives, designed to drive up productivity and ensure the countryside become a more attractive place for people to live, work, start a business and bring up a family.

Defra secretary Liz Truss said: "Our rural areas have huge potential which is why we're working to further unlock productivity to create a true One Nation economy.

"Our plan will help us create thriving towns and villages."

For further reading please click [here](#)



ASDA PUTS UK'S FIRST SUPERMARKET WONKY VEG BOX ON SALE

The UK's first supermarket 'wonky vegetable' box has gone on sale, containing enough ugly potatoes and knobby carrots to feed a family of four for an entire week for just £3.50!

The Asda box is filled with in-season winter vegetables and salad ingredients at a price that is 30% cheaper than standard lines. The vegetables - currently carrots, potatoes, peppers, cucumber, cabbage, leeks, parsnips and onions - have been selected from farmers' crops because they are misshapen, have growth cracks or are smaller or larger than average. The produce is washed but the discount reflects the fact that customers may need to spend extra time peeling it or they might not be able to use the whole vegetable.

Asda introduced imperfect fruit and vegetables into its stores in January 2015 as part of its permanent range in a move championed by chef Jamie Oliver and farmer Jimmy Doherty. During the latest series of the show, Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast on Channel 4, the pair revisited Asda's offering and challenged it to extend the range even further.

The environmental and financial impact of food waste has come to the fore recently with chef and campaigner Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's TV series, Hugh's War on Waste, which has blamed supermarkets for much of the food thrown away.

Just over 1% of food wasted in the UK – 200,000 tonnes – comes from stores, according to figures from the government-backed Waste Resources Action Programme (Wrap). Of the estimated 15m tonnes of food thrown away in the UK each year, more than half is disposed of in people's homes.

128 stores across the UK will stock the new veggie box.

"Our shoppers absolutely love wonky fruit and veg and we've seen sales steadily increase over the last year," said Ian Harrison, Asda's technical produce director.

For more information please click [here](#)



COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP GRANTS – DEFRA

The new hedgerows and boundaries capital grant opened for applications on 1 February and closes on 30 April 2016. It offers up to £5,000 for farmers who want to restore boundary features, such as hedges and stone walls, to protect their local wildlife or landscape.

The Forestry Commission's woodland creation grant is also opening this month (16 February to 31 March 2016 for initial applications) and offers farmers and other land managers up to £6,800 per hectare to plant, weed, and protect young trees.

Please click [here](#)

HOW CAN WE COMBAT RURAL LONELINESS?

For many people, rural sights, sounds and communities are preferable to an urban lifestyle. But for others - particularly the young and elderly - rural living can be difficult, whether shopping for basic foodstuffs, accessing training or employment or socialising.

While loneliness and social isolation are not the same thing, both are closely related and can have a severe impact on quality of life. In the UK, 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week and 11% are in contact less than once a month; over half of people aged 75 years and over live alone; and 59% of adults aged over 52 years who report poor health say they feel lonely some of the time or often (compared to 21% who say they are in excellent health).

What is loneliness and are there rural/urban differences in how it is experienced?

While the terms 'loneliness' and 'social isolation' are often used interchangeably, 'social isolation' is a measure of lack of relationships with other people whereas 'loneliness' is the subjective and negative judgement of the quality of these relationships. This means someone may be lonely and not socially isolated or social isolated but not lonely. In other words, there can be a mismatch between an individual's actual and desired quality and quantity of social contacts. While loneliness can occur at any time, it tends to affect more people in later life: perhaps through the loss of a partner or close friend, where family members or neighbours have moved away, ill health or through lack of confidence to go out. Equally, it can be an issue for young people, distanced from the services with infrequent, expensive public transport to reach them – how can young people meet friends after school/at weekends and get to sport and entertainment facilities?

To read the full article please click [here](#)

Also to access the 'Campaign to end loneliness' website please click [here](#)



EXPLORE ESSEX THIS WEEK ON COUNTRYFILE

BBC One iPlayer Catch Up (from Sunday 28th February at 19:00)

Matt Baker and Shauna Lowry are near Colchester on the Essex coast. Matt ventures to Mersea Island to meet Richard Haward, a seventh generation oyster fisherman. They head out to sea, where Matt learns about the decline of the native oyster and finds out how the local fishermen are joining forces with the Wildlife Trust to help save them. He also learns that native oysters are not just a key indicator of habitat quality, but that the habitat they help create is as valuable as coral reef.

Source: countryfile.com



PILOT STUDY LAUNCHED INTO DEMENTIA IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

'Farming, Dementia and Networks of Care' will explore the impact of dementia on farming businesses and rural communities, with the aim of providing better understanding of dementia in the countryside.

Findings of the study, which will begin as a pilot in Devon, will also consider the impact of dementia on farming businesses to evaluate how dementia also affects farming families and communities to consider how voluntary and state agencies can support farming families with dementia.

According to statistics from the Alzheimer's Society, the UK will see an increase of up to 156 per cent in dementia cases between now and 2051.

For further reading please click [here](#)

SPRING IS ON ITS WAY!



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