

ERP News

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What's your view on green food production?

Defra is seeking feedback on the future of food production and the environment in England – the challenges and solutions – as part of the Green Food Project. Please feel free to send your comments directly to Defra but also (if you wish) to info@essexruralpartnership.org.uk by 23rd March to help inform an ERP response.

Economic

Rural businesses to benefit from £60 million boost

Businesses in rural areas are to benefit from a new £60 million Government grant scheme that will allow entrepreneurs to turn ambitious plans into reality. The [Rural Economy Grant Scheme](#) will offer grants, which could be worth more than £1 million each, to businesses in the farm competitiveness, agri-food, tourism, forestry and micro-enterprise support sectors.

'Portas Pilots' competition launched to breathe new life into high streets

Mary Portas and Local Government Minister Grant Shapps have launched a competition to choose 12 towns to become 'Portas Pilots', with the winners benefiting from a share of £1 million to help turn around their struggling high streets. The 12 successful localities will take forward the first recommendation in Mary Portas's review to create 'Town Teams', made up of the key players in the community.

Help for struggling coastal communities

A new £23.7 million fund to help support struggling coastal towns create new jobs and prosperity has been launched by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles. The [Coastal Communities Fund](#) will help diversify and transform local seaside economies through regeneration of traditional assets and exploitation of emerging industries.

Cutting red tape will free up farming

A [raft of measures](#) designed to free farmers from the burden of red tape, help their businesses become more competitive and boost the economy whilst protecting the environment has been announced by Farming Minister Jim Paice. In response to the Farming Regulation Task Force, the Government will take action on 86% of the independent panel's recommendations made last May.

RCCE launches 2012 competitions to recognise rural communities

The quest to find Essex's best all-round communities has begun, with the launch of this year's Essex [Village of the Year and Best Kept Village competition](#). The [Best Kept Churchyard](#) competition will also seek to recognise and reward well-managed churchyards across the county. Entries should be submitted by Tuesday 10th April.

New campaign to encourage volunteering in Essex

[Essex County Council](#) has launched 'Good for Essex', a campaign aimed at encouraging more people to volunteer in their community. A website showcasing volunteering opportunities across the county has been developed in collaboration with the voluntary sector.

Challenging future for Rural Networks

The results of a scoping exercise seeking to map rural community development networks throughout the UK have been published in a report by the [Carnegie UK Trust](#). The paper reports the research findings and sets out recommendations to address the future sustainability of rural networks.

Young rural drivers most at risk report warns

Young rural drivers are 37% more likely to be involved in an injury collision than their urban counterparts a new study has revealed. The study by [Road Safety Analysis](#) entitled 'Young Drivers Road Risk and Rurality' compares the risk of collision involvement each year by local authority area.

New film highlights challenges of growing old in the countryside

A new film aiming to raise awareness about the reality of growing old in the countryside has been produced as part of a national campaign to highlight the challenges older people in rural areas face. The film entitled '[Over the Hill?](#)' is also accompanied by a factsheet, case studies and a full report.

Young people encouraged to Think Big for their community

[Think Big](#), run by O2 in partnership with UK Youth and National Youth Agency, is offering £300 grants to young people aged between 13-25 years old that wish to start a project that will make a difference in their community. Training and support is also available.

'Civic Core' identified by new research

Just over a third of the population together provide 90% of volunteering hours, four fifths of the amount given to charity and nearly 80% of participation in civic associations, a new study has revealed. The research, carried out by [TSRC](#), found that this 'civic core' had common characteristics – middle aged, professional, highly educated, likely to say that they are 'actively practicing' their religion and have lived in the neighbourhood for over 10 years.

Call for evidence on rural services

The [Rural Services Network](#) is seeking examples of good practice in rural service delivery as part of a commission from Defra, led by Rural Innovation. To participate, organisations are requested to fill in a short online questionnaire.

Environment

Nature Improvement Areas announced

New nature zones covering hundreds of thousands of hectares are to be set up across England. The 12 [Nature Improvement Areas](#) (NIAs), which include the Greater Thames Marshes, will each receive a share of £7.5 million to create wildlife havens, restore habitats and encourage local communities to get involved with nature.

Save water now to limit effects of drought

Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman has urged everyone to find ways of saving water, following the announcement that the South East is officially in drought. Speaking at a major [water summit](#) that brought together key players in the water industry, Ms Spelman said that it was not just the responsibility of Government, water companies and businesses to act; everyone needs to help by using less water.

New fund will enable communities to clean up local rivers

A £28 million fund to clean up England's rivers and encourage local wildlife to flourish has been announced by Environment Minister Richard Benyon. The [Catchment Restoration Fund](#) is part of Defra's £92 million commitment to clearing up England's waterways and will allow communities to tackle pollution and remove redundant weirs and dams to create thriving wildlife habitats.

Other News

Free Neighbourhood Planning Guide

RCCE, in partnership with the Essex Planning Officers Association and Community Led Planning Officer Network, has produced a free [step-by-step guide](#) for communities who want to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. The guide explains the technical requirements of each step, provides links to additional information and sets out the support available.

Dates for your diary

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| 21st March | Community Action Group Meeting , RCCE Offices , 2:30pm |
| 25th April | East of England Rural Forum (EERF) Meeting , venue TBC |
| 2nd May | Full ERP meeting , The Reid Rooms, Margaret Roding , 9:30am for 10:00am – 1:00pm, Steering Group meeting after lunch at 2:00pm |
| 20th July | 10 Year Anniversary Full ERP meeting , venue TBC, 9:30am for 10:00am – 2:00pm |

This newsletter is produced and sent by Rural Community Council of Essex on behalf of the Essex Rural Partnership. If you do not wish to receive this newsletter in future please email info@essexruralpartnership.org.uk with 'unsubscribe' as the email subject.

Compiled and edited by Daisy Martlew, Rural Community Council of Essex.

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