

## Economic

### Essex Apprenticeships up by 44%

The number of 16-18 year olds opting to take an [apprenticeship in Essex](#) has increased by 44% over the last academic year. During the 08/09 academic year 2, 242 16-18 year olds were taking apprenticeships; this number rose to 3, 229 during the 09/10 academic year, equating to a rise of 987 young people choosing an apprenticeship as a route into employment.

### Government must support rural businesses

NFU President Peter Kendall has said in a [statement](#) responding to the Budget that the Government must ensure it enables rural businesses to contribute to its drive for growth. Mr Kendall highlighted the importance of rural representation in Local enterprise Partnerships and that food production as an industry sector must not be overlooked. The cancellation of the fuel duty escalator and the 1p cut was welcomed and will especially help the food and farming industries that are struggling to cope with rising fuel costs, he said.

## Communities

### Localism Bill briefings

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) has produced a series of [briefings](#) on the Localism Bill, including a summary of the main proposals and detailed commentary and analysis of proposals for neighborhood plans. The briefings also include Assets of Community Value and Community Right to Buy Orders.

### Making the Big Society Good for Essex

Essex County Council has published a new Big Society prospectus, [Good for Essex](#), which outlines plans to empower local communities to improve their area. A £1.4 million Big Society Fund for community projects has also been set up, which builds on the Community Initiatives Fund launched in 2005. The prospectus was drafted with the input from the county's District and Borough Councils and includes a call for ideas from residents and the third sector.

### Pub closures damage rural communities, says Prince Charles

Prince Charles has warned that the decline of [rural pubs](#) could severely harm rural communities. At a tourism conference in Lode Cambridgeshire the Prince said that if people continue to shun rural pubs it will be like "pulling threads from the delicate tapestry" of rural life. He added that visitors to the countryside should be asked to make a donation to support farmers and local businesses.

## New Facebook page for Royal Wedding street parties

Essex County Council is encouraging residents planning to hold a street party in celebration of the upcoming Royal Wedding to share their plans on a new Facebook community page. The Council has been notified of over 50 parties planned so far with the aim that the new Facebook page will spread the word and allow party planners to share tips and ideas.

## Environment

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### Forest advisory panel members announced

Members of an independent panel of experts looking at forestry policy in England have been announced by Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman. The panel, to be chaired by the Right Reverend James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, brings together a range of expertise covering the social, economic and environmental aspects of forestry. The panel will put forward its recommendations to the Secretary of State in the autumn.

### Budget 2011 is a boost for rural communities and the green economy

Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman has welcomed the Budget as a “budget for growth” that “sets out a... framework to provide support for our rural communities... and deliver on our environmental objectives”. Some of the green measures include a £3 billion Green Investment Bank to develop green infrastructure coupled with a Green Deal to encourage energy efficiency in homes. New measures on Gift Aid and proposals on charitable giving through wills with reduced income tax will give a financial boost to organisations such as RSPB, the National Trust and Wildlife Trusts.

## Other News

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### Best Kept Churchyard

Rural Community Council of Essex's (RCCE) Best Kept Churchyard Competition 2011, sponsored by Lodge & Sons Ltd, is now open for entries from any group or organisation responsible for maintaining a churchyard in Essex. The competition rewards well-managed churchyards that provide a haven for wildlife and people, offering cash prizes for first, second and third place winners. Judging will take place between April and June and the winners will be announced at the RCCE AGM on 6<sup>th</sup> July.

## Dates for your diary

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| 5 <sup>th</sup> April | Full Essex Rural Partnership meeting, 9:30am at The Essex Golf and Country Club, Earls Colne |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> May  | Environment Action Group meeting, 10:00am at RCCE Offices, Feering                           |

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