



**Minutes of Community Action Group meeting
22nd Feb 2010
10.00 am RCCE, Offices, Feering**

Attendees:

Canon John Brown (JB)	Rural Community Council of Essex – CAG Chair
Keith Brown (KB)	Federation of Small Businesses
Ken Edwards (KE)	Active Chelmsford
David Eniffer (DE)	Volunteer Centre Tendring
Moira Groborz (MG)	Rural Community Council of Essex
Sheila Jackman (SJ)	Ongar Town Council
Alison Jennings (AJ)	IN-Tend
Keith Cheesman (KC)	Essex County Council
Chris Rust (CR)	Maldon District Council
Rachel Price (RP)	Essex County Council
Sue Sheppard (SS)	Rural Community Council of Essex
Darren Smart (DS)	Essex Libraries
Paul Williams (PW)	Essex County Council

Attendance

Kirsty Monk (KM)	RCCE (minutes)
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Apologies

Suzanne Harris (SH)	Rural Community Council of Essex
Angela Balcombe (AB)	Essex County Council
Kitty Barrett (KBa)	Braintree District Council
Judy Cuddeford (JC)	BDVSA
Paul Murphy (PM)	Maldon DC Vol. Service
Linda Riley (LR)	Voluntary Sector Training
Melanie Rundle (MR)	Colchester Borough Council
Jenny Salisbury (JeS)	Essex County Council - Essex Libraries
Joy Sheppard (JS)	Essex Association of Local Councils
Sue Sumner (SSu)	Council for Voluntary Service Uttlesford
Philip Wilson (PhW)	Essex County Council

Chairman's Introduction

John Brown (JB) (Chairman) welcomed and thanked all for attending the meeting, introductions were made.

Apologies: (please see above)

2 Minutes of the previous meeting (22nd June 2009) & matters arising.

Matters of Accuracy:

Pg. 1. Correction to DS instead of DC. No further Matters of Accuracy were raised.

Those present then agreed the minutes.

**The following were reported as updates/ matters arising from those minutes
Matters Arising**

Pg. 3 Essex Libraries

DS reported that as a follow up to an action discussed on 22nd June meeting, there was now an easily accessible internet link in each Essex library to the Citizens Advice Bureau Website.

Migrant Workers/ Essex Multi Agency Forum - MAF.

PW reported that the MAF group had become extremely active, the next meeting was due to be held on 15th March. An item of interest was that the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) subsidy had been reduced and this has had an impact on English language attainment by immigrant workers and their ability to access essential services (such as NHS and Social Care services and the employment market).

Environmental Action Group

KM reported that John Hall (EWT) had kindly agreed to take over the Chairmanship of the Environmental Action Group. The EnvAG is in the process of organising its initial meeting, JH (Chair) will be working with KM (Secretariat) to revitalise the Group.

Village Agents Update

KC reported that since we last met that the Village Agents Pilot Project had successfully launched its service (working closely with referral partners) of 12 Village Agents in localities in Braintree, Chelmsford and Maldon. The Village Agents pilot in Essex is funded by a partnership between Essex County Council, the Braintree Local Strategic Partnership and NHS Mid Essex.

The partnership has commissioned Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) as the pilot project delivery partner. The pilot project is scheduled to last until 31st March 2011. If it is successful and attracts further funding, it is hoped that it may be implemented throughout the County.

KB asked whether the FSB (Federation of Small Businesses) should become a possible referral partner.

Action: KC/ KM to forward the Village Agent Manager (Brian Goodwin) contact details.

KC/KM

Action: KM to ask Brian Goodwin for a list of Village Agent Referral Partners

KM

Further matters arising were covered within the main agenda items

3 Workshop – CAG Action Plan Priorities (part 1)

KM explained that the purpose of the workshops were to narrow down the priority action points taken from the new ERP Rural Strategy to form the basis of the Community Action Group Action Plan, focusing on those actions which the CAG felt could be delivered realistically by the partnership.

KM explained that actions under the Strategies “Active and Caring Communities” and “Affordable Housing” fell most appropriately to the CAG remit with joint actions required on cross cutting issues with other ERP action groups such as “Access to Services”, “A Thriving Economy”, “A Rich and Varied Environment” and Lobbying.

The first workshop focused on the “Active and Caring Communities” section of the Strategy and members considered who should be involved, how to be involved, ideas and then members proceeded to vote on their top priorities. Please see the attached workshop outcomes documentation for details.

Top Action Plan Priorities: Active and Caring Communities –

- ERP will encourage and support efforts by young people to get more engaged with their local communities.
- ERP supports the Work of the Village Agents, Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPS) and other such projects to assist rural communities. These projects should be encouraged to link with other existing networks.
- ERP believes Strategic Policies should be provided for the Promotion of Community Engagement (including Community Led Plans) and other enabling skills to aid local people to influence decision making

Action: DS to investigate if Essex Libraries could provide a link to information regarding Grant Sources for Parish Councils and Local Voluntary Groups.

Workshop – CAG Action Plan Priorities (part 2)

The second workshop focused on Affordable Housing and before members began the work shop, Moira Groborz (RCCE Rural Housing Enabler- MG) gave a presentation regarding Affordable Housing in Essex.

MG explained that the aim of her work was to improve the provision of affordable housing for local people in Essex villages where there is a need identified. MG worked in partnership with Parish and Town Councils, Local Authorities, RSL's and Essex County Council and rural communities to provide affordable housing which could be schemes such as social rented housing, shared ownership or intermediate rent housing.

AJ asked whether rural communities feel they need affordable housing.

MG advised that it was a mixed response. Some Parish and Town Councils have carried out housing needs consultations and some won't engage at all.

MG explained that an exception site definition is a plot of land abutting the development boundary of the village (which must have less than 3000 residents) which would be granted planning permission for no other purpose other than affordable housing.

KE asked why there was a less than 3000 resident's trigger.

MG responded that this was national planning policy. Over 3000 residents there is another mechanism in place in planning to provide social housing.

KE felt that the ERP Rural Strategy did not make its position clear regarding this trigger and this needed to be clarified further.

KE asked whether in larger villages Section 106 could be used to create homes through the local development framework.

MG said that there was a distinction regarding the size of the village, Section 106 covered villages under 3000 residents and it ensures priority for people with a local connection for example:

- Residents have lived there for a number of years
- Used to live in village
- Close family live there
- Need accommodation for work
- No right to buy homes available
- Shared ownership stair casing limit of 80%

MG advised Housing Needs Surveys (HNS) were a cheap and easy way of evidencing need for affordable rural housing, the only cost to Parish and Town Councils were the photocopying costs. 52 Housing needs surveys had been carried out in Essex to date, 86 units of affordable housing had been completed and 18 were under development. A further 21 units were likely to come through this year.

LAA2 Housing Project Board L.I. 2.2 Affordable Housing.

MG explained that there is a lack of understanding about the principles of affordable rural housing by some parish and district councillors which leads to lack of support for schemes or engagement with the Rural Housing Enabler. MG has been tasked to help take forward an action plan to tackle this issue and had been given funding to implement it. Actions proposed were:

- Affordable Housing Information Pack
- Parish and Town Council Event on 16th April 2010,
- Open Office drop in event
- Affordable Housing DVD
- Seeing is believing tours (possible)

MG asked how the Essex Rural Partnership could help.

CR to promote event to Parish Clerks Forum in Maldon AJ and DE will look into local liaison in Tendring.

JB felt that we needed to keep in touch with MG to ensure we were moving in the right direction and to think about how we (Essex Rural Partnership) can best assist the work of the Rural Housing Enabler.

KB asked whether local rural business could be included in HNS.

MG said that it would be possible to include rural businesses in the HNS and it was up to the Parish Council as to whether they wished to include them in the consultation process.

CAG members then proceeded to vote on their top Affordable Housing priorities. Please see the attached workshop outcomes documentation for details.

Top Action Plan Priorities: Greater Availability of Affordable Housing

- ERP will encourage every Parish Council to identify the housing need in its community and to take steps towards addressing outstanding need
- ERP will support the Rural Housing Enabler project and recognises it as a means of ensuring that development is initiated in accordance with local need
- ERP will engage with the Rural Housing Enabler project to raise awareness of the socio-economic benefits of affordable housing to rural communities

8 Date of next CAG group meeting and other meetings/events dates.

Action: KM to potential CAG circulate meeting dates to CAG Members

KM

- 10th March Full Partnership Meeting, Marks Tey Parish Hall. (Time 9.30am Registration to 1.15pm followed by buffet lunch) Theme: " Transition Essex"
- CR highlighted the Parish Clerks Forum 24th March – she will report back/ comment on this forum meeting.
- Friday 16 April 2010, My Village, My Home, Margaretting Village Hall - An event to inform and raise awareness about affordable rural housing for local people.

Meeting concluded at 12.40pm