

Economic

New Housing Strategy launched

The Government has launched its [new housing strategy](#), which will get Britain building more homes, boost the economy, create jobs and help first time buyers. Some of the key measures include the new build indemnity scheme to help first time buyers get on to the property ladder, the Right to Buy scheme, a commitment to provide more affordable homes and action to bring empty homes into use.

New £20 million fund for rural businesses

A new £20 million fund to help farming, forestry and horticulture businesses become more resource efficient has been launched by the [Rural Development Programme for England \(RDPE\)](#). The Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme will offer grants of up to £25, 000 to invest in green projects, machinery and improvements to animal health and welfare, which will enable rural businesses to grow in a sustainable way.

Free broadband for a year for SMEs

[The Daisy Group PLC](#), a fast-growing independent UK provider of cost-effective communication services to SMEs, is offering free business broadband for a year for a limited time only.

£95 million Regional Growth Fund for SMEs

Hundreds of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) will benefit from government investment of £95 million as part of the [Regional Growth Fund](#). The scheme will provide grants to support SMEs considering investing in new capital assets and creating new employment.

Communities

Localism Bill gets Royal Assent

The Localism Bill has become law after receiving Royal Assent on 15th November. The [Localism Act](#) delivers more than 30 coalition commitments putting a variety of rights and powers at the disposal of local people to take charge of their future.

Update to plain English Localism Act guide

The Government has published an update to the [Plain English Localism Act guide](#). The document describes the main measures of the Act under four headings: new freedoms and flexibilities for local government; new rights and powers for communities and individuals; reform to make the planning system more democratic and more effective; and reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally.

Communities come together over Neighbourhood Planning

Community representatives from 23 of the [frontrunner projects](#) trialing new neighbourhood planning powers met last month to share their experiences of best practice. Government officials, representatives from Locality, Planning Aid, CPRE and the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment were on hand to answer questions.

Action for Market Towns release small towns reports

[Action for Market Towns](#) (AMT) has released the first two in a series of essays as part of their Small Towns for Tomorrow project. 'Small towns of the future, not the past' sets out why small towns are so important and 'Small towns, big societies' explores the Government's keenness on the 'Big Society' and the 'semi-invisibility' of small towns in relation to policy and local government.

Essex 'Love Where You Live' competition winners announced

Two photos that capture the spirit of community were chosen as winners for the Essex [Love Where You Live](#) photo competition. Billericay Town Council was the overall winner for a photo taken during its Big Litter Pick in October, with Rayleigh Town Council winning the junior prize for a photo of Cubs and Guides at a clean-up event. Both winners will receive a selection of gardening tools worth over £100 and over £75 respectively.

'Celebrate your fete' for London 2012

[Essex County Council](#) is offering grants to community groups wishing to organise a fete in their local area to celebrate the London 2012 Olympic Games. 'Celebrate your Fete' will offer grants of £400 to parishes, towns or voluntary groups throughout the county to help boost an existing event or create a new one.

Environment

Renewable Heat Incentive opens for applications

Businesses and communities are now able to apply for a heat tariff payment for heat generated from renewable technologies such as biomass, solar thermal and heat pumps installed since July 2009. The [Renewable Heat Incentive](#) is a world first and will help the UK to meet its 2020 renewables target, whilst cutting carbon emissions by 43 million tonnes by 2020.

Consultation on Feed-In Tariffs launched

[Department for Energy and Climate Change](#) (DECC) has published a consultation paper on proposed changes to Feed-In Tariffs (FITs) for solar photovoltaic (PV) cells. Proposals include a reduction in current tariffs, multi-installation tariff rates for aggregated schemes and a new energy efficiency requirement. The consultation closes on 23rd December 2011.

Defra to commission work to support Marine Conservation Zones

Environment Minister Richard Benyon has announced that [Defra](#) will be commissioning extra work to support and strengthen the evidence base for Marine Conservation Zone (MCZs) designations. The move follows advice from the independent Science Advisory Panel that there are a number of gaps and limitations in the evidence and it is important that this is rectified to ensure successful, well-managed MCZs.

Government sets standard for sustainable forestry

A practice code for sustainable forest management that sets the standard for all woodland in the UK has been published by the Government. [The UK Forestry Standard](#) details the conditions that must be met when felling trees, carrying out woodland operations and receiving grants, and ensures that international agreements and conventions on climate change, biodiversity etc. are applied.

Forestry Commission launches public GIS data download service

A [data download service](#), which enables users of geographical information systems (GIS) to access spatial datasets directly from the website, has been launched by the Forestry Commission. Users previously had to commission staff to prepare the data for them.

New environment fund to support groups working in the Stour Valley

A new fund that will benefit charities and voluntary groups working to enhance the environment and community life in the Stour Valley and Dedham Vale AONB has been launched. The [Stour Valley Environment Fund](#) (SVEF) is both donation seeking and grant giving and provides a channel through which individuals, families, companies or charitable trusts can support the area.

Other News

New Essex Online ICT support service launched

A new not-for-profit ICT service providing unbiased ICT support to the voluntary sector has been launched. RCCE teamed up with Suffolk ACRE to create [essexonline.net](#), which extends the well-established [suffolkonline.net](#) service.

Simple ways to grow your own

Christine Walkden, gardening expert on BBC1's The One Show, will be giving a talk and sharing some expert tips on growing your own fresh produce on 16th February 2012, 7:30pm at Writtle College. The free event has been organised by the [Edible Essex](#) project and is sponsored by Essex and Suffolk Water. Booking is essential.

Dates for your diary

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 13th December | Community Action Group visit to Harwich Connexions Community Trust, Harwich 1912 Centre, 10:30am (<i>please contact daisy.martlew@essexrcc.org.uk if you would like to attend</i>) |
| 18th January | Full Essex Rural Partnership & East of England Rural Forum joint meeting, Hylands House, Chelmsford, registration from 9:30am, meeting commences at 10:00am |

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.

Rural Community Council of Essex Registered Charity No. 1097009. Company registered in England and Wales No. 4609624