

Economic

New rural business hubs to promote economic growth

A £15 million pilot project to support rural businesses has been launched. [Rural Growth Networks](#) will help rural areas overcome barriers to growth, such as poor broadband provision and lack of suitable premises, and will enjoy preferential status when applying for grants from Defra's Rural Development Programme for England. The closing date for applications is 31st January 2012.

Lessons learnt from broadband pilots

A [report](#) that sets out the lessons learnt from broadband pilots announced in 2010 has been published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The report focuses on their set-up, procurement and other activities such as work to stimulate demand.

Have your say on the CAP reform

Farmers, environmental groups and others with an interest are being encouraged to submit their views on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, as part of an informal consultation in England by [Defra](#). To understand how the proposals will affect different sectors, Defra is asking people to answer an online questionnaire. The consultation closes on 5th March 2012.

Portas sets out blueprint for high street revival

TV presenter and retail expert Mary Portas has published her [review](#) of the state of Britain's high streets, setting out her vision and recommendations to revive those struggling to survive. Some of the recommendations include new 'Town Teams' to champion local high streets, affordable town parking, greater inclusion of high streets in neighbourhood planning and encouraging innovative use of empty buildings.

Communities

£10m investment in community transport

The Government has announced an additional £10m investment for the establishment and development of [community transport](#) in England. The funding will be distributed to 76 local authorities in England, outside of London; further information and guidance will be issued in due course.

Essex chosen as one of four community budget pilots

Essex has been chosen as one of four areas in England to pilot a new model of public service: a [Whole Place Community Budget](#). The pilot will see public sector partners coming together to redesign services around the

local community. Proposals include simplifying processes in the health and social care system for elderly people, joining up services and reshaping local skills provision for young people.

Environment

Independent Panel on Forestry publishes progress report

The [interim report](#) from the Independent Panel on Forestry has been published, with the full report due in the spring. The Panel was established in March 2011 to advise on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England.

Other News

New one-stop-shop advice service for farmers

[Defra](#) has launched a new one-stop-shop service for farmers needing advice on a broad range of subjects including cross compliance, nutrient management, competitiveness and climate change adaption and mitigation. The Farming Advice Service (FAS), to be launched in the New Year, replaces the old cross compliance advice programme.

South East LEP website goes live

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership has launched its brand new website. For all the latest news, events and information regarding the LEP visit www.southeastlep.com

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

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| 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 |
| 18th April | East of England Rural Forum meeting, venue TBC |

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