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Government reshuffle

The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP has been confirmed as the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whilst David Heath MP has been announced as the new Minister of State. Owen Paterson is MP for North Shropshire and takes up his position after serving as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for two years. Liberal Democrat David Heath is MP for Somerton and Frome – a prominent dairy farming area. Richard Benyon MP, himself a farmer in West Berkshire, retains his position in the Defra team, which he has held since May 2010, as does Lord Taylor of Holbeach who was appointed in September last year. More information about their [individual responsibilities](#) will be published shortly.

Ministerial positions and personnel mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter refer to positions held prior to the reshuffle.

Economic

Top 10 digital trailblazers revealed

A [top 10 list](#) that pinpoints the rural areas where online entrepreneurs are boosting the local economy has been compiled by Google and the Countryside Alliance. The list is being used to highlight that entrepreneurs need not be located in urban or industrial areas to succeed in business. Great Dunmow has been ranked at number eight on the list with Hockley in third place.

Six coastal communities get economic boost

Six seaside projects that will create new jobs and stimulate new enterprises, including one based in [our region](#), are the first to receive funding from the Government's [Coastal Communities Fund](#), launched earlier this year. Each project will receive grants of up to £2m, to be used for skills training, apprenticeship schemes and enterprises that rejuvenate seaside assets or that exploit emerging industries.

SMEs urged to realise potential of 'purple pound'

New [guidance](#) aimed at making small and medium sized enterprises more aware of the £80bn spending potential of disabled people and encouraging them to capitalise on the success of the London 2012 Games has been launched by Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller.

Call for post-Olympic tourism revolution

An [£8m campaign](#) to triple the number of Chinese visitors to the UK, boost domestic tourism and increase sport and cultural tourism, as part of a lasting legacy from the Olympics, has been announced by Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt. The government will work with the industry to ensure that Britain makes the most of being in the global spotlight this year.

Farmers want to work with local community

New research has found that an increasing number of farmers are keen to work more collaboratively with local businesses and community groups, but need help to overcome the barriers. The [Plunkett Foundation](#), who commissioned the research, is now launching a campaign to raise awareness amongst the farming community and food enterprises of the mutual benefits of working together.

Communities

Cash boost for Communities and Neighbourhood Planning

A £10m fund to help communities bring jobs and homes to their neighbourhood has been announced by former Planning Minister Greg Clark. Councils will be able to bid for up to £30,000 for each scheme to help pay for the cost of putting plans in place, and to support and advise communities taking forward [Neighbourhood Plans](#).

Communities have chance to take over unused land and buildings

[Essex County Council](#) is offering community groups the chance to take over unused county council land and buildings. The new policy is in line with the government's localism agenda and will help groups rejuvenate unused buildings to provide services benefiting their local communities.

Maldon first council to sign up to 'Save our Villages'

Maldon District Council is the first local authority in Essex to sign up to the ['Save our Villages'](#) campaign. The campaign, run by the National Housing Federation, aims to raise awareness of the need for and benefit of affordable housing in rural areas.

Inspiring communities to think outside of the allotment patch

New simple ['how-to' guidance](#) to inspire communities to turn a patch of unused green space into a local allotment has been published by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles. The publication gives advice on how to get access to less conventional sources of land to grow food, as well as suggestions for wider community involvement, funding and examples of successful projects.

Environment

Making Environmental Stewardship more effective

From 1st January 2013, five new [Entry Level Stewardship](#) (ELS) and Organic ELS options will be available. The new options are being introduced as part of a raft of measures to improve the environmental outcomes and value for money the scheme delivers.

Value of CFE options confirmed

New research into the effects of Environmental Stewardship on farmland bird populations has revealed that [CFE \(Campaign for the Farmed Environment\) options](#) have a positive effect on declining species. Overwintered stubble and wild bird seed mixes were shown to have the greatest effect on yellowhammer, linnet, reed bunting and grey partridge populations.

Government needs to protect Green Belts

A new briefing and map published by the [Campaign for the Protection of Rural England](#) (CPRE) highlights major threats to England's Green Belts. Threats include housing developments, new roads, open cast coal mines, airport expansion, golf courses and industrial parks – amounting to a development of a new town greater than Slough over the next 20 years, CPRE claims.

Other News

'Rural Oscars' open for nominations

The 2012 [Countryside Alliance Awards](#), nicknamed the 'Rural Oscars', are now open for nominations from the public. The categories have been altered slightly this year to represent rural start-up businesses trying to get established. Nominations will close at the end of October.

Dates for your diary

- 14th September** **EERF meeting**, NFU Office, Newmarket, 9:30am – 12:00pm
- 28th September** **Essex Coastal Conference**, Shire Hall, Chelmsford, 10:00am – 4:00pm (*Economic/Environment Action Group members*) **Invitation only, booking essential**
- 10th October** **Full ERP meeting**, Foakes Hall, Great Dunmow, 10:00am
Steering Group meeting after lunch at 2:00pm (*Steering Group members only*)
- 20th October** **RCCE Village Halls & Community Buildings Conference**, Highwood Village Hall, 9:30am – 3:00pm
- 9th November** **Community Action Group visit to Highwood Catch-up Café**, Highwood Village Hall, 11:00am
- 19th December** **ERP Steering Group meeting**, RCCE Offices, Feering, 10:00am (*Steering Group members only*)
- 30th January 2013** **EERF meeting**, NFU Office, Newmarket, 9:30am – 12:00pm

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

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