



Essex Rural Partnership

ERP Full Partnership Meeting Minutes of the Meeting held at 10:00am on 2nd May 2012 The Reid Rooms, Margaret Roding

Present:

| | | | |
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| LA | Lindsey | Allen | Forestry Commission |
| KB | Keith | Blackburn | Essex County Council |
| JB | Canon John | Brown | Rural Community Council of Essex (Vice Chair ERP) |
| JBu | Cllr John | Buchanan | Essex Association of Local Councils |
| JC | John | Carr | Essex and Southend LINK |
| PC | Cllr Peter | Chillingworth | Colchester Borough Council |
| RC | Richard | Colley | Harwich Connexions |
| LD | Les | Double | Harwich Connexions |
| KE | Ken | Edwards | One Chelmsford/Active Chelmsford |
| SF | Sam | Fry | Essex County Council |
| JGR | Cllr John | Gili-Ross | Essex Association of Local Councils |
| SH | Suzanne | Harris | Rural Community Council of Essex |
| SJ | Cllr Sheila | Jackman | Essex Association of Local Councils |
| JJ | Cllr John | Jowers | Essex County Council (Chair ERP) |
| AL | Andrew | Lowing | Rochford District Council |
| ALu | Amanda | Lumley | Visit Essex |
| DM | Daisy | Martlew | Rural Community Council of Essex (Minutes) |
| MN | Mike | Neale | Environment Agency |
| JN | Rev Dr Julie | Nelson | Diocese of Chelmsford |
| RN | Cllr Richard | North | Essex Association of Local Councils |
| MP | Cllr Mick | Page | Essex County Council |
| DP | Dominic | Petre | Visit Essex |
| NS | Nick | Shuttleworth | Rural Community Council of Essex |
| PS | Phil | Smith | Rural Shops Alliance |
| MT | Michael | Talbot | Essex Association of Local Councils |
| PW | Paul | Williams | Essex County Council |
| RW | Richard | Woolley | Rural Community Council of Essex |
| TW | Tony | Wright | East of England Ambulance User Group |

Apologies:

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|----|----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| JA | Julie | Aiken | Essex County Council |
| RA | Rosemary | Alexander | Farm Crisis Network Essex |
| AB | Angela | Balcombe | Essex County Council |
| CB | Claire | Beecroft | Environment Agency |
| TB | Ted | Benton | University of Essex |
| GC | George | Courtauld | Rural Community Council of Essex |
| JD | Joy | Darby | Essex Association of Local Councils |
| PH | Paul | Harris | Maldon District Community Transport |

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| MI | Mark | Iley | Essex Biodiversity Project |
| JL | Jenny | Lewsey | Maldon District Council |
| TM | Tricia | Moxey | CPREssex |
| RP | Rosemary | Padfield | NFU |
| LR | Linda | Riley | Voluntary Sector Training |
| MR | Melanie | Rundle | Colchester Borough Council |
| JS | Jenny | Salisbury | Essex County Council |
| MS | Mike | Sandison | Geo Essex |
| DS | Darren | Smart | Essex County Council |
| PhW | Philip | Wilson | Essex County Council |

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Chairman Cllr John Jowers welcomed all to the meeting.

2 **Apologies**

Apologies were taken as read (please see above for details).

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th January 2012**

Agreed as accurate.

3.1 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4 **Harwich Connexions – Richard Colley**

Presentation is available to download from the ERP website and a copy has been circulated with the minutes. Questions were taken as follows:

PC – As far as I am aware there is nothing else like this in the county. Are all your 39 employees part-time or volunteers?

RC – Some are part-time and some are full-time. The nursery, for example, employs mainly women with families, so part-time hours suit them. We employ a few people to run the buses, but it's mainly volunteers that drive the buses. It's thanks to the volunteers that we afford to price ourselves much lower. We can undercut the public or private sector, but we try not to compete directly and focus on delivering the services that are needed.

LD – We have put in a bid for the Coastal Communities Fund – hopefully our performance since 2003 will prove us worthy.

JJ – There seem to be great disparities in coastal towns – either they are very wealthy or more deprived. With regards to Community Asset Transfer, I have called for research into assessing the community value rather than financial value of assets. ECC is becoming a commissioning organisation and Harwich Connexions is exactly the type of organisation we should be commissioning.

LD – It is not easy for social enterprises to go through the e-tender process. The data it holds is not real-time, but the computer system does not reflect this and goes on old data. It would be more helpful if we could talk to a person and if the process could take into consideration that people's needs change over time.

SJ –How did you get the capital funding?

RC – It wasn't easy, but we managed to seek out opportunities and seize them quickly. We always deliver more than we say we will, which pleases funders. EEDA had confidence in us because of this. The money to purchase the vehicles was from different funds, including Government funds and Essex schemes.

RW – Do you think you have the opportunity to be a more proactive organisation and seek out other activities rather than wait for ECC to come to you, or should you remain community responsive?

RC – We mustn't lose focus and we have to be realistic. A lot of people are dependent on us and we don't build up vast reserves as we'd rather use the assets and money we've got in the community. We are currently going after a very large sum of money and if we are successful it will help develop some great initiatives.

NS – Have you been receiving interest from other towns wanting to look and learn from what you have done?

RC – It tended to happen more during the MTI. Sally Williams from Action for Market Towns used to phone us up and ask if we could visit towns all over the place. It made me realise that often the biggest problem in rural areas is personality politics.

KE – How much of your £530, 000 turnover is down to grants, commissions and earnings?

RC – We were 100% dependent on grants when we started, but it has grown to roughly a third/third/third respectively.

5 Essex Legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games – Sam Fry

Presentation is available to download from the ERP website and a copy has been circulated with the minutes. If anyone would like to promote any events that tie in with key dates in the Olympics calendar, please contact Sam who can cascade it down to the press.

JJ requested that questions to Sam be asked during the coffee break.

A 10 minute interval was taken for refreshments at 11:50 am

6 Visit Essex: Tourism activities in the county – Amanda Lumley

Presentation is available to download from the ERP website and a copy has been circulated with the minutes. Visit Essex would like to work with the ERP on promoting the rural theme. Questions were taken as follows:

LD – In 2012 we were forced to close the Tourist Information Centre. Do you have an opinion on whether we should have a centre in Harwich as it's a gateway?

ALu – Cost is prohibitive, but we are looking at alternatives. People are now planning their journeys so we are looking at mobile provision, possibly mobile huts that can hand out literature at peak times and link in to hand held devices that can answer visitor enquiries. Old MacDonald's Farm is working with us and Brentwood Council to provide a TIC-like service, so there are opportunities for businesses. Although information should be available for visitors, it doesn't necessarily have to be available just when they get here.

RW – The Yorkshire dales, moors etc. all conjure a picture in your mind. Do you think that Essex may be having problems because it doesn't have a distinctive vision and that the diversity makes it difficult to promote?

ALu – We need to identify the strong appeal for the county and build on it. Dedham Vale and Constable Country could be an image people associate with Essex, so this is something to potentially build on. We've just carried out some perception research and people predominantly think of Essex as fun, lively and diverse. The coast also features heavily in people's minds, which could be because they associate it with the traditional seaside holidays driven by East Londoners having days out on the coast. We need to build on this but also understand what the emotive thoughts are. Rurality is low on the list but when you talk to people who have visited Essex they talk about the wide open spaces and countryside.

RC – When marketing Essex do you think you are up against the negative perceptions? Often to the outside world we are the butt of jokes.

ALu – I've been all over the country and everywhere has its problems. No publicity is bad publicity, so we should turn it round in our favour. 'The Only Way is Essex' has given us huge exposure and now people know where Essex is on the map.

DP – Having that slight perceived tarnish can actually be a good thing. People visit and discover what they were not expecting and so revisit because they feel that they have made that personal discovery. With some careful thought and marketing we can use this as a positive.

ALu – We are trying to align ourselves with London as a geographical indicator because everyone knows where London is and Essex is right next to it. The press are already discovering their own Essex, much of it positive e.g. Telegraph feature had a picture of Audley End House.

7 Report from Defra Rural and Farming Network meeting (Cllr John Jowers)

There are now 17 members, originally 14. The meeting on 17th April was attended by two ministers – Jim Paice and Richard Benyon – Lord Selbourne, Mr Cahoon (RHS) and others from all over the country. The first meeting consisted of everyone introducing themselves and topics of interest, of which the main issues were the drought, water management and broadband. They were very interested in the fact that Essex had set up a pilot scheme in Maldon (BuzzCom) as some are having real problems with broadband. The meeting was heavily dominated by farming issues, and I would have liked there to be more discussion on other topics such as affordable housing, planning, fuel poverty and rural transport. I made the argument for the seats to be substitutional – If I'm unable to attend another member of the ERP should be able to go instead.

8 Report from East of England Rural Forum (EERF) (Suzanne Harris)

The theme for the meeting held last week was 'housing and rural affordable housing'. There were three presentations from the Homes and Community Agency, National Housing Federation and Community Land Trust, all of which are available on the EERF website. Funding should continue for at least another year so please quash any rumours that the EERF is closing. One of the seats on the Rural Network is held by Farming Food and Rural Network East, which is

a partnership between EERF and FAB, therefore their focus is predominantly farming – this shows how important it is for Essex to have a seat.

JN – The discussion and presentations around housing were very good and highlighted that housing is a much bigger issue than just rural.

9 ERP Action Groups and taking the Essex Rural Strategy forward

9.1 Report from the ERP Steering Group (Suzanne Harris)

The last meeting held on 18th January after the Partnership meeting in the morning was mainly focused on preparations for this meeting and the Defra Rural and Farming Network meeting. All other important things have been picked up in other agenda items.

9.2 Report from the ERP Community Action Group (Canon John Brown)

At the last meeting on 21st March we recapped the Good for Essex project and received an update on Village Agents. We discussed the benefits of inviting representatives from borough and district councils. JB is delighted that Harwich connexions came to present today, and it shows that the CAG visits to communities result in some interesting and important developments. We will be planning future visits to Nazeing, Wimbish and Brightlingsea, amongst others.

9.3 Report from the ERP Economic Action Group (Suzanne Harris on behalf of Philip Wilson)

The Group met on 23rd April 2012 to receive a range of presentations, the central theme being the importance of being ready for the next round of European funding commencing January 2014. Whilst by no means definite, it is looking likely that future rounds of ERDF and RDPE funding are likely to follow the “Leader ” approach whereby local groups put together programmes for which they apply for substantial levels of funding from Defra that are then allocated locally on a competitive basis. These groups need to be able and willing to volunteer their time and expertise to support these programmes and partnerships such as the Essex Rural Partnership are well placed to furnish people for these “Local Action Groups”.

Other items considered were rural broadband and an update on the Essex Post Office initiative that is due to finish within the year. Petra Crees from ECC was pleased to report that 9 out of the 11 post offices re-opened under the rescue programme are commercially viable to carry on trading without future public subsidy.

A work programme for 2012/13 was laid out and agreed by the group. Four thematic sessions based on; tourism, diversification of agricultural assets to keep up with changes in farming and energy practises, rural shops and broadband. Skills for business would also retain a standing item on each agenda.

9.4 Report from the ERP Environment Action Group

The group has not met since the last meeting.

10 Soapbox items

NS explained that RCCE has set up a heating oil bulk-buying scheme. Many rural communities are highly dependent on heating oil and RCCE wanted to do

something to bring down the prices for communities and businesses. It is a local scheme but also a national one that involves other RCCs across the country to provide buying power. Other RCCs that have set this up before us have reported average discounts of £50 on a typical 1000L order of oil. For more information please contact Nick.

11 Any Other Business

None

11.1 Dates of future meetings

- 30th May – Community Action Group meeting, 10:00am, RCCE offices
- 15th June – ERP Steering Group meeting, 10:00am RCCE offices
- 31st July – 10 Year Anniversary Full ERP meeting, Channels Golf Club, Chelmsford, 9:30am – 3:00pm
- 29th August – ERP Steering Group meeting, RCCE Offices, Feering, 10:00am. Community Action Group meeting, 2:30pm
- 10th October – Full ERP meeting and Steering Group meeting, venue TBC, 9:30am
- 19th December – ERP Steering Group meeting, RCCE Offices, 10:00am

The meeting concluded at 1:00 pm