



## Essex Rural Partnership Meeting (ERP)

Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007 10.00 am

Hylands House, Hylands Park

### MINUTES

#### Present :

John Hall ( <b>Chair person</b> )- Essex Wildlife Trust	Cllr. Charles Braithwaite - EALC
Jim Smith (pres'1) -Green Arc	Alex Butler-Zagni – NFU
Richard Devanney (pres'2) Renewables East	Chris Allen - EEDA
Peter Chillingworth –Colchester Borough Council	Kitty Barrett – Braintree District Council
Sandy Cruickshank – Go East	Phil Smith – Rural Shops Alliance
Keith Hughes – Business Link	Cllr. Roger Walters – Essex County Council
Terry Taber – Fed. of Small Businesses	Geoffrey Wilkinson – Essex County Council
Peter Baggott – EALC	Gemma Driscoll – Essex County Council
Tony Shelton – Age Concern Essex	Keith Blackburn – Essex County Council
Geoffrey King – Essex Disabled Association	Miriam Stead- Essex County Council
Jenny Salisbury – ECC Libraries	Mick Page – Essex County Council
Ian Trowse – Natural England	Keith Lawson- Essex County Council
David Alborough – Northumbrian Water	Wendy Jackson- Essex County Council
Nick Shuttleworth – RCCE	Anthony Buston – Essex County Council
Suzanne Roast – RCCE	Brian Stacey – Essex County Council
Sue Sheppard – RCCE	Paul Sutton – Epping Forest District Council
Kirsty Monk– RCCE (Minutes)	Steve Bowers – Environment Agency

#### 1. Welcome and Apologies:

Acting Chairman John Hall (JH), Essex Wildlife Trust, welcomed everyone to the Essex Rural Partnership meeting and thanked delegates for attending.

#### **Apologies received from:**

Tim Isaac- CLA Eastern Region	Angela Balcombe - ECC
Melanie Rundle - CBC	Dianne Hardy- ExDRA
Joy Sheppard -EALC	Clive Mardiner - EREC
Jane Cryer- EET	Lynne Meacock - Essex Wildlife Trust
Chris Gibson - English Nature	Sarah Bell ExDRA
Greg Smith - English Nature	Richard Bailey- ExDRA
Elaine Woods- ECC	Mathew Fletcher - LSC
Paul Williams- ECC	John Devall -Northumbrian Water Limited
Sally Thallon - ECC	John Brown - RCCE
Neil Keylock - ECC	Dominic Petre
Linda Smart - ECC	Mike Bateson -TDC
Ed Gregory- ECC	Mike Hall - Writtle College
Dan Gascoyne- ExDRA	Sue Sumner -Uttlesford CVS
Wendy Scattergood- BDC	

## 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 27/09/06

Matters of accuracy: none were raised at the meeting however there was a subsequent query regarding the name of the contact in the Essex Crime and Disorder Partnership; to be clarified.

**Agreed:** Suzanne Roast

## 3. Matters arising from those minutes:

### Item 5

JH asked Keith Blackburn (KB), ECC, whether there was any feedback from the Crime and Disorder Partnership on the implementation of a new community policing strategy in rural areas which was carried out as a response to a recent rural crime survey.

KB responded that he had no feedback as yet to report.

### Item 10

Suzanne Roast (SR) advised the meeting that Dan Gasgoyne had sent his apologies to the ERP as he was unable to attend today. With regards to his useful presentation on Rural Entrepreneurship at the last meeting and details of the upcoming meeting in November, he would let the ERP know further details shortly.

## 4. **A presentation by Jim Smith Operations Manager Green Arc – “An Introduction to Green Arc”** (a copy of the presentation is available on request)

Jim Smith (JC) gave an overview of the mission statement for Green Arc and their aims. Primarily Green Arc aimed to be a multi agency, cross regional, cross county strategic landscape initiative which aimed to enhance, protect and conserve the green belt for public use, to increase and expand green infrastructure to growth area populations and to protect and conserve biodiversity and wildlife.

JC showed the meeting the areas covered by the Green Arc project – this could best be described as the areas surrounding the M25. The North East Area of the project covered Hatfield Forest in the North of the area, down to Thames Chase in the South, Hainault Forest and Lee Valley Park, Epping Forest and Broxbourne wood in the West and North West. Their ultimate aim was to link these oases of natural habitat with wildlife corridors (also for the benefit of the communities which use them) which would connect them all as part of Green Arcs 40 year plan of regeneration of green spaces in the area.

JC explained that they had many contributing partners and delivery partners which helped Green Arc carry out their aims. (Please see presentation for details).

JC spoke of encouraging and engaging local communities and working with community groups and delivery partners to progress the aims of Green Arc. He gave an example of this engagement, in the planting of 35,000 trees by local people in Theydon Bois. Green Arc has a 40 year plan; current funding is for a period of two years.

### Questions: -

1. *Are there were Developers guidelines issued by Green Arc which could be cascaded upwards, on environmental impact and use of resources (Planning Gains supplement 28/2) which could be used in the development planning process and lead to an overall project based approach. Also that currently there was a large amount of waste produced by Developers creating a large carbon footprint which impacted on the environment, were Green Arc looking at this issue? - Keith Lawson (KL)- Essex County Council*

**JS replied that Green Arc was very much looking to be involved in this process and were finding ways to work with developers on his issue. As far as the carbon footprint issue was concerned, it was Green Arcs aim to educate Developers and minimise the carbon foot print, with their aim being to bring about zero carbon developments in the future.**

- II. *With the problems affecting the farming community (for example Dairy Farmers) and the issue) of land management (with regard to the changing use of agricultural land to non agricultural) are Green Arc working towards creating a synergy between the two groups?*  
- Chris Allen EEDA

**JS replied that Green Arc were talking to Land Managers as well as listening to them. There is a lack of funding available and Green Arc are looking at ways of working with funding groups and finding funding streams to further this work.**

*John Hall (JH) said it was important for organisations like the ERP help support the work of Green Arc and bring it to the attention of Government and External Funders.*

- III. *Can we co-operate with the private sector as business partners in this? - JH*

**JS replied that although working with the private sector could bring about complications, it was something that Green ARC were looking at doing in the future.**

- IV. *Is the geographical area covered by Green Arc fixed or will it be extended further? Nick Shuttleworth (NS) RCCE*

**JS said that in the short term the boundaries were most definitely fixed - there were similar projects in other areas which were increasing the "Green-grid" coverage.**

- V. *JH raised the issue of the Livestock farmers surviving in today's tough financial market and the resulting loss of grasslands – he then asked if Green Arc were tackling this?*

**JS said that they were tackling this issue already and working with livestock farmers.**

- VI. *What about the use and management of woodlands as a fuel source? – Sandy Cruickshank ( SC) Go East*

**JS said that Green Arc had not done a lot of work so far on this issue and was looking to extend its activities in this area.**

*The presentation and question session ended and JH asked SR to begin her report on the ERP steering and Action groups.*

## **5 Report from ERP Steering Group**

Suzanne Roast (SR) RCCE

Suzanne Roast (SR) referred delegates to the Steering Group Update handout for a detailed update. SR confirmed that recent Steering Group activities have included 2 projects awaiting the approval of EEDA:

- 5.1 **Rural Retail Advisor (RRA)**- a travelling position. The RRA would share good practice such as effective marketing and display of products and advise on retail viability in rural areas. The project is endorsed by ExDRA and included in the Mid and West Essex LIC Business Plan. EEDA's approval is awaited.

- 5.2 **Remote Rural Access Points** – these are internet access points set up in rural villages and market towns. These would be set up in existing public buildings or shops, so that local communities have access to internet learning, training, new skills and health advice via the web. The proposed project is to pilot the scheme in Maldon. SR was hopeful that this project would be approved.

### 5.3 Report from the Community Action Group (CAG) Suzanne Roast (SR) RCCE

SR reported some news updates from the CAG to the meeting:

- There were projects being undertaken by the group (previously circulated to the ERP group).
- There is 2 year funding programme for the Community Planning Fund (CPF) by the Rural and Social Community Programme. There had initially been a slow uptake by applicants but this had now improved. Recent authorisation had meant that the CPF award had now been expanded to include projects arising from community led plans and consultations. This was available to applicants until the end of this financial year (applications by 20/03/07) .
- An Election toolkit from the EALC was now available to aid participants in local elections.
- The Next meeting is scheduled for 14/03/07

### 5.4 Report from Economic Action Group (EcAG) Keith Blackburn (KB) ECC

KB explained to the meeting that the EcAG had made actual progress in their 5 major tasks (funding, rural crime, social enterprise, advice to rural retailers and work on planning and diversification) and referred to the report circulated to the meeting. (Please see attached report for full details)

He asked the ERP group to consider the proposals outlined in the context of the activities already planned and decide which, if any the partnership wished to pursue.

John Hall (JH) – The Chairman asked the ERP to ask themselves the question – are we doing the right thing and are there other issues we should be undertaking? He asked that any partners that wished to contribute to or change the action plan do so and feedback to KB.

### 5.5 Environment Action Group Peter Baggott (PB) – EALC

PB advised the ERP that there had been 2 meetings of the joint groups since the last ERP meeting. They had covered many items and had:

- Agreed their terms of reference.
- Had a presentation by Essex and Suffolk Water.
- Established a carbon reduction programme.
- Looked at the carbon footprint issue and aim to aid its reduction and or limiting.
- Climate Change issues discussed.
- Discussed the wheel of Communication.
- Discussed Waste recycling – use of methane from landfill sites in electricity production.
- Looked at composting and it's by products.
- Anaerobic digestion - processed sealed chamber products.
- Renewable energy sources and Bio fuels.
- Looked at Bio -diversity programs.

### 6. The Essex Rural Strategy Plan (ERSP) Suzanne Roast (SR) RCCE

SR discussed the Essex Rural Strategy document with the meeting outlining the areas and priorities currently covered by the Strategy issued in 2005 (copies available to those who don't already have one - please let SR know).

It was felt by many in the ERP that an addendum to the Strategy was required as some actions had been achieved already and on the other hand new key issues had arisen since the formulation of the strategy that need to be addressed (such as post offices in rural areas and rural shops).

SR asked the ERP to feedback any issues to her for inclusion in the addendum.

SR also mentioned that she was reviewing the ERP Action Plan would be revising it in time for the next ERP Meeting.

SR explained that there was a Rural Services Survey due to be carried out which would hopefully identify needs in the rural community. It would be a static snapshot of county services and useful for the ERP to aid us in arguing for funding for current and future projects. A final draft will be ready soon and put to the ERP for consultation before sending.

The Chairman advised the meeting to inform SR of any urgent items that needed to be taken forward or added to the ERS and Action Plan, as there was a time constraint factor to consider.

*The meeting adjourned for a coffee break at 11.20am. Meeting resumed at 11.50 am*

7. *Presentation by Richard Devanney (RD), Support Manager Renewables East - "An Introduction to Renewables East" (a copy of the presentation is available on request). RD gave a brief overview of the reasons why there was a large potential mass market for renewable energy in Essex, the main reasons were as follows:*

**East of England**

- £86bn economy (10% UK)
- 5.5m people
- 10% population increase
- UK's ideas region
- highest R&D spend
- 75% of region agricultural
- 25% of region cereal crops
- 7% of region forest
- 4.5% electricity from renewables
- Leading renewable energy
- UK first e85 filling station
- Worlds first Bio-butanol plant
- £8 billion of offshore wind
- Circa 500K new homes to be built  
In the East of England

This meant that there was a huge potential for mass market renewables such as small-scale wind farms, Biomass, Solar Hot Water, Ground/Air/Water Source Heat Pumps. Renewables East was a three year partnership comprising a Support Manager in Essex, and Development Director. RD's role was to increase capacity of mass market renewables within Essex by acting as a central source for information and expertise relating to mass market renewables, Establishing a handholding & advocacy programme for LAs, businesses, schools, & community (& other) groups.

They aimed to build strong links with LA planners and building control, building developers, architects, housing associations, installers as well as working to stimulate the supply side for mass market renewables, particularly for biomass and ensuring training provision for a number of technologies. He wished to champion near to market renewable energy sources and another large part of his role was to work within Essex to facilitate and promote the change to renewable energy sources by domestic users, community groups, Local Authorities, public building and schools.

RD told the meeting that there would be a Mass Markets Renewable on 21/03/07 and the ERP would be most welcome to attend. There was also a Bio fuels seminar to be held on 08/02/07 in Maldon.

Some ERP members felt that Renewables East covered some of the same remit, objectives and services provided by existing organisations.

**Questions: -**

1. *The Communities Renewables Initiative - CRI (based at Writtle College) appears to cover similar territory to Renewables East – why is this? - Nick Shuttleworth (NS) RCCE*

**RD explained that the CRI are part of Renewables East, helping community groups get renewable sources installed.**

8. **Biodiversity Conservation Projects in Essex** John Hall (JH) Essex Wildlife Trust.

JH explained that there 3 essential strands of the same project with one aim which was to protect and enhance the biodiversity in Essex, South end and Thurrock through action, protection and information. JH circulated a document to the meeting outlining the above in detail (copy available on request).

He went on to explain each of the 3 strands;

- **The Essex Biodiversity Project** – this facilitates the implementation of the Essex biodiversity action plan to protect declining species and habitats in England.
- **Essex Wildlife Sites Project** – which finds and protects key areas of land representing the minimum habitat we need to protect in order to maintain the current wildlife resource in Essex.
- **Biological Records Initiative** which aims to provide up to date information and data on species, habitats and land cover in digitalised format to be used by statutory agencies, planners and professional users.

9. **Report from the Regional Rural Forum** John Hall (JH) Essex Wildlife Trust

JH advised members that recently there had been a change of emphasis by the powers that be. They had switched their emphasis from market towns to focusing on the issues of larger cities. JH had stressed the importance of continued support for market towns and their particular issues.

They had looked at the need for sustainable homes which were competitive and affordable in rural communities and setting up learning and skills groups for migrant workers and rural workers in the region, under the Market Towns Initiative.

10. **England's Trees Woodlands and Forests** Brian Stacey (BS) Essex County Council

BC reported on the conclusions to the consultation on the review of the England Forestry Strategy (a copy of this was circulated to ERP members - available on request). Generally the respondents agreed with the consultation documents.

The four main objectives which underpinned the consultation document were:

1. To safeguard England's resource of trees, woodlands for future generations;
2. To protect the environmental resources of water soil and air and to protect and enhance biodiversity and landscapes (both woodland and non-woodland) and cultural values.
3. To encourage that woodland and trees enhance the quality of life for those living in, working in or visiting England;
4. To encourage the development of new improved markets for sustainable woodland products and services, where this will deliver identifiable public benefits, nationally or locally

The consultation paper containing 32 questions was sent to 558 recipients (not including ECC or ERP) and was published on Defra's website. The consultation period lasted 12 weeks and 221 responses were submitted. Analysis of the results will be used to draft the new England Forest strategy.

## 11. Rural Post Offices

Suzanne Roast (SR) RCCE

SR circulated the summary of the Government Consultation Paper on Post Office to the meeting (copy available on request)

SR said that according to the DTI with new technologies, changing lifestyles and a wider choice of accessing services, people were visiting Post Offices less. As a result, Post Offices Ltd losses had risen to £4 million a week in 2006 and more than 80% of the rural network was making a loss. The network of post offices was unsustainable in its present form. The current number of Post Offices is 14,500, this will be reduced by the closure of some 2500 (compensated) post offices over an 18 month period commencing summer 2007. No details of uncompensated closures have been released as yet.

One of the items for concern regarding government guidelines for closure of these post offices was the "criteria for access" for rural communities. The current guidelines state that in remote areas there is a post office within 6 miles of 95% of the population.

Wendy Jackson (Essex County Council) felt that this might as well be 100 miles if there were not the transport links in place to get the population there, as rural transport links were already in decline and the guidelines did not take this into account.

Stephen Bowers (Environment Agency) asked if the consultative document took into account the impact of the post office and shop closing recognising the wider role in the community the post office plays?

SR answered that this aspect had been touched on by the document. However there was the expected outcome of the effect of closures on rural shops that a significant number of sub post masters would consider closing their shop if they lost their post office income.

Charles Braithwaite (EALC) asked if post office services could be relocated in existing shops and public buildings?

SR explained that the outreach methods proposed as a solution to rural communities who would lose their post offices relied on another existing service to host their service and provide a limited service, but this was not comparable to the current post office service.

Jenny Salisbury (Essex CC Libraries) said that she would be happy to consider the idea of incorporation of post office services in the services offered by mobile libraries – which were currently under review.

SR was concerned that the document makes the assumption that if the commercial post office service is withdrawn, the voluntary sector will automatically step in to fill the gap in services. This is obviously too large an assumption to make.

SR asked members to help her in formulating her response on behalf of the ERP to the consultation which had to be completed by 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

The Chairman, John Hall wanted to know how the government intended consulting with local communities regarding the closure of post offices and urged members to be involved in the joint response as well as their individual organisations responses.

## 12. Soapbox

- **Mobile Library Services** Jenny Salisbury (JS) ECC Library Services  
JS is the strategic Manager in charge of the review of mobile library services in Essex. They visit 640 locations with 16 vehicles as well as visiting those in residents in sheltered accommodation.

They recently undertook a consultation exercise which inspired a large response of 3000 individual responses. The main message from this consultation was that the public were keen to keep the mobile library service going in rural areas. This had helped determined the revised criteria to help ensure future of mobile libraries such as:

- Rationalisation and review of current mobile library stops.
  - Not to take away any current stops
  - No new stops within 2miles of a static library with appropriate access.
  - A change to fortnightly service.
- **Overview of Heritage and Arts Services** Miriam Stead (MS) Essex County Council

MS outlined part of her of her role which was to facilitate the creation of new and improvement of existing creative industries and cultural tourism with various partners across the voluntary sector.

Creative Industries were to be encouraged by a mapping process which would find space for artists and individuals to work by converting buildings to studios and providing facilities to work. They also looked at promoting Essex as a good place to work.

Through "Cultural Tourism" they had studied the impact of the forthcoming Olympics and ways of promoting the heritage of Essex with special events heritage sites as well as engaging the local community in these events and working with voluntary groups.

- **Dedham Surgery** Mick Page (MP) Essex County Council

MP highlighted that although a GP's surgery had been built in Dedham and set up thanks to the work of the local community – due to cost cutting measures the PCT had withdrawn funding and local people would no longer have access to a local GP's surgery. This meant longer journey times and reduction in service to patients in the area. It highlighted the key issue that access to Health Services in rural areas is being reduced and in some cases existing NHS services are closing completely, the impact of which cannot be ignored.

- **Rural Proofing Toolkit** Chris Allen (CA) EEDA  
CA explained that the definition of rural proofing was long winded - essentially it was transparent assessment if strategic services for rural communities and identification of any adjustments that need to be made.  
There was a Rural Implications Toolkit Group with a regional forum. They were holding workshops about rural proofing, PCT funding and the loss of Post Offices. CA told the meeting that he would circulate this to ERP Members for items to be added to the list of current issues.

- 13. **A.O.B.**  
None

- 14. **Date of Next ERP Meeting:** 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007

**MEETING CLOSED at 12.20pm.**