

# Respecting our Past, Embracing our Future:

## A Strategy for Rural Essex



## Our Vision, Aims and Priorities



**The Essex Rural Partnership** brings together organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to co-ordinate action on the major economic, social and environmental issues facing rural Essex.

Established in 2002, the Essex Rural Partnership has met regularly since then, providing a forum to exchange information, develop collaborative projects and encourage a co-ordinated response to important policy issues. It also provides a rural evidence base, available to all member organisations. As an independent body, Essex Rural Partnership is well-placed to lobby on the strategic issues that matter to people who live and work in the county's rural areas. In 2012 Essex Rural Partnership was awarded membership of Defra's national Rural and Farming Network, enabling it to engage directly with Government.

**Our vision:** A county which engages, values and respects its rural environment; and where rural communities fully contribute to and benefit from a healthy, prosperous and connected Essex.

### What we want to achieve: Aims

- 1. Prosperity.** To build a dynamic and sustainable rural economy, where businesses and communities are mutually supportive, and where all the assets and benefits of rural Essex are actively promoted to encourage investment.
- 2. Well-being.** To enable everyone in Essex to enjoy our rich and diverse environment, and support rural residents to live well and access health services when they need them.
- 3. Connection.** To support the development of rural broadband and rural transport, while championing rural networks and facilities.
- 4. Innovation.** To promote new approaches to service access and delivery for rural communities, with a focus on mobilising community assets.

# Our priorities for 2016-2020

## Harnessing the potential in our rural economy

- 1 a) We will continue to provide both support and challenge to the superfast broadband programme to help address inadequate broadband and mobile connectivity – in particular, we expect to see the Rural Challenge pilot looking to reach out to other parts of rural Essex.
- b) We have also become increasingly aware of the limited information that we have about our rural economy, and will be working with partners to address this, as we develop our new evidence resource.
- c) We will seek to maximise the benefits of programmes and projects which encourage economic growth and job creation. We will also identify, support, and where appropriate lead on, opportunities to bring new programmes to Essex.
- d) We will work with partners to remove barriers to diversification for land-based businesses.
- e) We will encourage use of redundant buildings, especially those with historical merit, and we will explore the potential for under-utilised and redundant buildings to be adapted to support rural development.

## Education and skills for life

- 2 a) We will engage with Government to ensure it delivers in Essex on its pledge to increase apprenticeships in rural areas to support food, farming and small tourism businesses, and support high quality apprenticeships in our communities.
- b) We will engage with local authorities and academy providers to ensure the long term future of rural schools.

## Farming for the future

- 3 a) We will help to promote and develop a food and farming sector that is resilient to global commodity price fluctuations by creating a dynamic and forward looking business environment and infrastructure.
- b) We will support the food and farming sector to meet the challenges of climate change by exploring approaches that either protect against the negative impacts or enhance the positive aspects of climate change.
- c) We will encourage developments that support and enhance the food supply chains across the county to help integrate local food production with the wider Essex population.

## Attracting visitors to rural Essex

- 4 a) We will facilitate sustainable tourism development.
- b) We will work with Visit Essex and local partners to promote rural Essex, package the tourism offer and give it an identity.
- c) We will support the development of the England Coast Path in Essex.

## Celebrating our culture and heritage

- 5 a) We will continue to work with partners on creative approaches to ensuring our historic buildings remain at the heart of rural communities, for example, in the use of church spaces for community groups and shops.
- b) We will develop closer links to national bodies to ensure their programmes are aware of and engaged with issues and opportunities in rural Essex.
- c) We will assist in promoting our heritage to a wider audience.

## Securing a place to live

- 6 a) We believe that the shortage of affordable housing in rural areas can only be addressed if a range of housing types and tenures, including provision of housing for rent, can be made more widely available.
- b) We believe that provision of affordable housing should be guided by up to date evidence of local need and should prioritise meeting the needs of local residents.
- c) We recognise the importance of the Rural Housing Enabler service but in view of the changing strategic context would encourage providers that support the service to explore new approaches to delivering affordable homes.

## Accessing the services we need

- 7 a) We will encourage the development of effective rural proofing processes for use by local service providers.
- b) We will support initiatives that improve access to health care, support independent living and reduce isolation and loneliness in rural areas.
- c) We will encourage the development of innovative and sustainable transport solutions, which are responsive to the needs of dispersed rural populations.
- d) We will ensure that support is available to facilitate community enterprise and other initiatives that strengthen the provision of essential local services.
- e) We will encourage non-commercial solutions to providing the transport that is necessary to reach essential and valued services.

## Thriving and pro-active communities

- 8 a) We will encourage initiatives that promote leadership from parish and town councils and local voluntary organisations.
- b) We will encourage the devolution of responsibilities to local communities in appropriate circumstances.
- c) We will promote the benefits of Neighbourhood Planning and other measures that give communities greater influence over their future development.
- d) We will support those who give of their time to keep community facilities available for those who live and work in rural areas.
- e) We will encourage de-regulation to reduce barriers to volunteering.

## Feeling safe and reducing crime

- 9 a) We will encourage the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex and Essex Police to support community safety initiatives that address the specific needs of rural communities and businesses.
- b) We will support communities in taking local action to make their homes and environments safer.
- c) We will support initiatives which bring benefits to rural areas.
- d) We will work with other partners to ensure our residents feel safe. This will include Essex Trading Standards and Essex Civil Protection and Emergency Management.

*continued overleaf...*

## Our priorities for 2016-2020 continued...

### Protecting and promoting our natural environment

- 10**
- a) We will use our influence with Defra and DECC to ensure the voice of Landowners - as 'custodians of our landscape' is represented, and funding mechanisms do not have unintended impacts upon Rural Essex.
  - b) We need to interact fully with organisations such as EPOA (Essex Planning Officers Association) and statutory bodies (e.g. Environment Agency and Natural England) and the local environmental bodies (like Essex Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and the RSPB) at a strategic/national level.
  - c) We need to ensure that the Essex Rural Partnership continues to be both 'Champion' of the rural economy, environment and society, extending our membership to those organisations/decision makers whose actions impact directly upon the environment.
  - d) We will support initiatives that record and protect the unique biodiversity found in rural Essex, and which enable this to add value to tourism and benefit economic prosperity.
  - e) We will engage with Natural England and the designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in our county to ensure that ongoing boundary reviews are to the benefit of rural Essex.

### What happens next: Delivering in partnership

The next four years promise to be both exciting and challenging times for rural communities in Essex.

#### TO PLAY YOUR PART IN ENABLING THIS STRATEGY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, PLEASE:

- Visit our website and find out how you can get involved with the partnership
- Sign up to our Newsletter to keep up-to-date on the latest developments
- If you are a member of the partnership (or want to be), support our meetings, help us to deliver our priorities
- Share our strategy with your networks... and do get in touch to tell us what you think

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A copy of '*Respecting our Past, Embracing our Future: A Strategy for Rural Essex*' can be found on our website, [www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk](http://www.essexruralpartnership.org.uk) along with supporting documents and evidence.