

Vibrant Rural Communities

Unlocking the Potential of the East of England's Rural Areas

Action Plan Consultation Spring 2011

The East of England Rural Forum (EERF) believes that rural communities, their people, businesses & the natural environment are an essential part of the economic recovery. EERF's recent paper¹, "*Vibrant Rural Communities*" (2010), describes a vision for inclusive, prosperous and dynamic rural areas. It highlighted three key challenges for rural areas over the next ten years:

- **digital inclusion** so that rural areas benefit from the opportunities presented by the web to improve skills, employment, access to services & social inclusion;
- **rural economic growth** so that rural areas can match the ongoing increase in the rural population with new sustainable jobs in high value sectors;
- **a positive approach to demographic change** by ensuring that housing, services & economic opportunity allow people of all ages, backgrounds & skills to thrive in rural areas.

This consultation process builds on *Vibrant Rural Communities* by exploring how the public and private sectors can work together with communities to deliver its recommendations. EERF is keen to work with all relevant organizations to develop pragmatic solutions which can be implemented at a time of budgetary constraint & which recognise the changes being planned in the delivery of services.

The paper contained 18 recommendations which for the purposes of this consultation on the Action Plan have been divided into five main themes:

- **Broadband and Telephony Services;**
- **Economic Growth and Skills;**
- **Housing and the Built Environment;**
- **Sustainable Development;**
- **Access to Services.**

Budgetary constraints, organisational change and new delivery structures mean that any actions proposed must be priorities, clearly focused, deliverable and demonstrate a clear rural

¹ East of England Rural Forum (2010), *Vibrant Rural Communities: Unlocking the Potential of the East of England's Rural Areas*, <http://www.eerf.org.uk/Strategic-Rural-White-Paper.shtml>

distinctiveness. The outcome of the consultation will be used to influence and work with delivery bodies to ensure that the ambitions set out in *Vibrant Rural Communities* can be achieved.

The recommendations agreed for the *Vibrant Rural Communities* paper during 2010 (updated where necessary) are listed below. For each recommendation, we need to identify **how** it will be achieved, **who** are the partners for its delivery and how will we **monitor** progress and recognise success.

In developing a final action plan resource and organisational constraints must be recognised, and consultees are thus invited to consider the following points whilst commenting on how the recommendations can be implemented:

- Rural communities will be better served by a limited number of well focused and deliverable actions rather than a large number of aspirational actions which are neither possible to resource or deliver;
- Where possible, actions should build on tried or tested models, which could be replicated in other local areas quickly and efficiently;
- A lead body must be able to be identified for each action with the remit, resources and focus to deliver effectively;
- Where possible the rurally distinctive nature of the proposed action must be clarified or where this is not possible, actions must be clearly aligned with wider interests including those in urban areas.

Next Steps

In developing the action plan, the EERF is keen to work with people and organisations across the East of England and nationally to define in more detail the actions which need to be taken to deliver the inclusive, prosperous and dynamic rural areas set out in *Vibrant Rural Communities*.

Feedback both at these consultation events and independently is therefore welcomed. All feedback should be submitted to Lynn Collison at lynn@collisonassociates.co.uk by **23rd March 2011**.

EERF specifically welcomes feedback on the following five questions:

1. Are the priority actions outlined above still the correct ones to focus on and if not, how would you modify or prioritise them?
2. What actions are already being taken locally or nationally to deliver on these themes, and how can rural communities in the East of England build on this existing work?
3. Are there additional actions which need to be taken to reflect new or growing needs?
4. In the context of new delivery structures and budget constraints, who can lead delivery in the priority areas?
5. How can progress with delivery be monitored?