



EERF

East of England Rural Forum

Vibrant Rural Communities

Action Plan

Delivering the Recommendations

Spring 2011

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

Vibrant Rural Communities: Action Plan

Delivering the Recommendations

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.

During spring 2011, the Forum ran a consultation process which invited business, public sector and community representatives to contribute to an Action Plan to develop and prioritise rurally distinctive and deliverable actions to ensure that the vision set for our rural areas in *Vibrant Rural Communities* was delivered.

The consultation process engaged over 120 organisations, local government representatives and individuals in a series of workshops and also invited written responses. The consultation asked for input on five delivery themes (full feedback in Appendix 2):

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

Consultees were asked to consider the impact of budgetary constraints, organisational change and new delivery structures when making proposals for the actions they wished to see delivered.

Our Action Plan is intended to be a living document which will be regularly reviewed and updated by the Forum. It is hoped that in parallel with its sister paper, *Vibrant Rural Communities*, it will provide both context and actions which can help local communities, public sector bodies and the LEAs serving those living in rural areas in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk to take the steps to allow these areas to be more economically and socially successful.

The actions proposed are of necessity very focused and do not cover all potential areas in which action could be taken and where other bodies have the lead role, this is acknowledged (e.g. farming). By focusing on a limited number of areas, the Forum hopes that it can work with partners across the East of England to deliver effective change and development in rural areas for the benefit of everyone.

¹ East of England Rural Forum (2010), see <http://www.eerf.org.uk/Strategic-Rural-White-Paper.shtml>

The Action Plan

Action 1 - Advocacy and Demand for Rural Broadband

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Supports | Broadband and telephony services, Economic Growth and Skills, Access to Services |
| What | Develop an EERF sub-group to enable those leading rural broadband delivery locally to meet and discuss issues, best practice and delivery focus |
| How | EERF sub-group established to bring together rural broadband delivery leads to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share experience of broadband delivery across rural areas;• Develop a joint position on issues where there is a need to lobby for changes to facilitate the roll out of fast broadband e.g. lobby DEFRA on RDPE de minimus block exemption for broadband projects;• Share practice and develop consistent approach for rural broadband demand surveys;• Analyse results of demand surveys to identify common themes, differences and changing priorities to inform advocacy. |
| Who | Rural broadband leads from across the region with other interested parties (membership of sub-group should include CLA, NFU, technology providers etc.) |
| When | Established by summer 2011, initially for 12months with a review in summer 2012 |
| Monitoring | Reports back to EERF |

Action 2 - Broadband Delivery Partnerships

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Supports | Broadband and telephony services, Economic Growth and Skills, Access to Services |
| What | Develop rural broadband delivery partnerships across the 6 counties to promote broadband uptake, undertake demand surveys and secure support |
| How | Local delivery partnerships to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey potential users to assess demand, based on types of service rather than technology;• Develop collaborative bids for BDUK, RDPE and ERDF funds to deliver enhanced broadband to rural areas;• Work with councils to overcome planning and technical issues which may arise in fixed line (e.g. access to the network) or mobile roll out (e.g. new masts). |
| Who | County Councils with the support of DCs, LEPs, ALCs, business and community interests and where applicable linked to the local rural partnerships |
| When | In all areas by summer 2012 |
| Monitoring | Will monitor own progress and feedback into CC democratic processes |

| Action 3 - Map and Promote Rural Growth Potential in LEP areas | |
|---|---|
| Supports | Economic Growth and Skills, Housing and Built Environment, Sustainable Development |
| What | <p>Develop papers to promote the local economic potential of investment in the rural economy dealing with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and education and the beneficial impact of focusing on solving skills' gaps and skills' shortages as well as tackling the under-performance in rural attainment; • Growth sectors of the rural economy including knowledge based businesses, green economy, agriculture and the food chain, tourism; • Local workspace creation, rate relief, business support and finance needed to stimulate new business creation and business growth; • Local planning frameworks to support rural workspace creation. |
| How | Rural economic opportunity papers developed for each LEP area to detail rural growth potential and the issues which need solving to deliver growth including skills, workspace, business support and finance |
| Who | Rural partnerships at local level working with regional business groups (e.g. EEBG, IoD, FSB, Food and Agriculture Board, NFU, CLA, Tourism Associations etc.) to develop a rural economic growth paper in conjunction with each LEP |
| When | During 2011 |
| Monitoring | Inclusion of rural issues in LEP business plans |

| Action 4 - Rural Enterprise Zones (REZs) | |
|---|--|
| Supports | Economic Growth and Skills, Housing and Built Environment, Sustainable Development |
| What | <p>Develop Rural Enterprise Zones (REZs) on a competitive basis across rural and coastal areas, based on market and coastal towns or village scale sites.</p> <p>Target REZs in areas with low business start up rates, high reliance on public sector jobs, which are in transition or with other disadvantage.</p> <p>REZs would be at a scale appropriate to rural communities but would offer financial, planning and infrastructure benefits to stimulate new business start up.</p> <p>REZs would provide links to business support, broadband, finance, workspace, training provision, short term rate relief, low rates of Community Infrastructure Levy, mentors.</p> |
| How | Bidding process to encourage communities to bid for REZ status |
| Who | Partnership of LEPs, Councils and local business community propose and select suitable rural communities, with central government support via the Regional Growth Fund, RDPE, ERDF or similar funding programmes |
| When | Pilots should be established by 2012 |
| Monitoring | REZs monitored on the basis of job creation, business starts and business growth |

Action 5 - Promote Community Led Planning

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|-------------------|--|
| Supports | Housing and Built Environment, Economic Growth and Skills, Access to Services, Sustainable Development |
| What | Develop the potential for communities to take a lead on planning for balanced and sustainable growth |
| How | <p>Provide facilitation to help (clusters) of rural communities to come together to develop robust local plans for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic growth and skills;• Housing;• Access to services in the private and public sector. <p>Larger villages or Market/Coastal Towns will justify their own plans but in many cases it is more appropriate to develop community plans for clusters of rural communities, which collectively are large enough to sustain services, jobs and engagement in planning.</p> |
| Who | RCCs working with Councils, LEPs and other local stakeholders to engage and support local communities in community led planning exercises and reviews. |
| When | On-going rolling programme, with target to cover all rural communities by 2015 |
| Monitoring | Community Action Plans feed into LDFs and LEP business plans, with clear feedback on actions taken to address the priorities identified |

Action 6 - Rural Services Delivery Partnerships

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Supports | Housing and Built Environment, Access to Services, Sustainable Development, Economic Growth and Skills |
| What | Develop local service delivery partnerships across multiple communities to provide a range of services |
| How | <p>Establish and support clusters of communities and providers who work together to facilitate service delivery at the local level (below district but above ward level). Delivery partnerships focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services in the public, community and private sector;• Transport;• Skills, business and employment support to develop a vibrant local economy. |
| Who | Local Councils, service providers and the public sector work together with business and community representatives to deliver responsive collaborative services to rural communities |
| When | Target to cover all rural communities by 2015 |
| Monitoring | Delivery success measured by access to facilities |

Action 7 - Rural Transport

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Supports | Access to Services, Economic Growth and Skills, Sustainable Development |
| What | Develop an EERF sub-group to review and disseminate best practice in relation to a range of transport solutions to meet the access needs of rural communities |
| How | Develop and promote pragmatic rural transport solutions using a combination of private, public and community based provision. This should include supporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The creation of rural transport partnerships at the county or unitary level• Rural provision in mainstream public transport services;• Chartered services which link access to education and employment needs;• Dial a ride / demand responsive provision;• Car sharing schemes;• Wheels to work programmes for rural young people. |
| Who | Sub-group should include representatives of transport users, EERF members, rural transport providers and mobile services which reduce the need for travel |
| When | Build on existing partnerships but focus on the extra challenges created by the recession, rising travel costs and continuing demographic change |
| Monitoring | Monitoring by the EERF |

Action 8 - Affordable Housing

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Supports | Housing and Built Environment, Economic Growth and Skills, Sustainable Development |
| What | EERF housing sub-group to produce a set of recommendations on how to create affordable housing in rural areas, which builds on the recommendations made to DEFRA and other Ministers in 2010, in the light of changes to housing policy and budgetary pressures |
| How | Develop and promote pragmatic rural affordable housing solutions using combination of private and housing association provision. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting mixed market and affordable housing schemes to bring forward new commercial sites;• Promoting exception sites in rural communities;• Supporting local sheltered housing schemes for the elderly to allow them to stay in their communities whilst releasing housing for families. |
| Who | Led by existing EERF housing sub-group with new members recruited where needed to help take actions forward |
| When | By December 2011 |
| Monitoring | Reports to EERF |

Additional Action Areas

In addition, there were a number of other areas where the consultation identified demand for action but less clarity on the way in which the Forum could take the lead. These include:

- **Young people** - across all workshops there were numerous references to prioritise the needs of the young and young families who are widely recognised as having particular pressures which have been exacerbated by the recession. There are clear links to issues around training and transport, which are highlighted in the actions above but no single over-arching action which relates to young people. A key issue was seen to be the need to get the 'young persons' voice' more actively engaged at every level from the EERF to the local level. EERF itself will seek to recruit young members and then to organise a specific event or conference on the issues affecting the young in rural areas.
- **Food production** - one of the workshops made very strong recommendations on the need to ensure food security and this was picked up to a lesser extent at other events. In general, consultees felt that this was an issue for other forums, such as the reformed Food and Agriculture Board (FAB, formerly Sustainable Farming and Food Group), which should take the lead. This has been actioned.

Two areas were raised which EERF will raise with DEFRA ministers during the regular meetings between ministers and rural forums:

- **Energy and fuel poverty** - this topic area whilst a DEFRA priority did not feature strongly in feedback except at the last workshop (which had input from a project working in this area). There are, however, interesting links to transport fuel costs which were raised by several groups and this suggests that whilst fuel poverty is normally taken to mean only household energy costs, there is a need in rural areas to broaden this out to include transport fuel costs when assessing the impact of energy costs on standards of living. This is an area which EERF will promote with the Rural Affairs Minister and the DEFRA rural policy team.
- **Volunteers** - throughout the consultation, the issue of volunteers cropped up repeatedly. However, whilst clearly integral to actions on community led planning and delivery (5&6 above), community transport (7), economic and broadband advocacy (1&3), there were no suggestions made for a specific action targeted on volunteers. This reflects the diversity of the issues which affect different volunteers. EERF will continue to press government to recognise that volunteering is not free; that volunteering requires support and facilitation; and of the need to reduce legal constraints (e.g. health & safety and liabilities) to make it easier for volunteers to operate. Many volunteers are also finding it hard to fund their transport to volunteering opportunities. Others who provide community transport are only receiving 14p per mile, which for some will not even cover their fuel, let alone the true costs of car usage which for most users are over 45p per mile.

Appendix 1 - Complete List of Recommendations

The list of actions below takes account of the changes recommended by the consultation process in spring 2011 and therefore updates the recommendations published in the Rural White Paper in autumn 2010.

In most cases, the consultation process resulted in minor changes to the wording of the original recommendations (please see red text in Appendix 2). However, in the case of recommendation 7, it was completely rewritten to better reflect current needs, In relation to recommendation 9 on broadband, a second separate recommendation (9b) has been developed on specific issues with mobile telephony.

Agreed Recommendations

- 1 Development policy and the planning system must place more emphasis on achieving sustainable rural communities by facilitating the growth of rural villages and market towns so that they fulfil their long term potential
- 2 Economic development policy must focus on creating rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the rural population of working age, with a target to grow the East of England rural economy at 3% per annum compared to the RES target of 2.3% for the whole economy
- 3 Resources need to be targeted at promoting the skills and aspirations of the young and unskilled in rural areas so that they can fully engage in the growth agenda
- 4 Funding allocations for training/learning provision must recognise the need to increase flexibility of training provision in rural areas and to close the gap in skills performance in more remote rural areas
- 5 Economic development policy must encourage the creation of more rural workspace to facilitate an increase in rural jobs
- 6 The government should review the treatment of refurbishment in relation to VAT to encourage more rural properties to be brought back into commercial, community or full time residential use
- 7 Provide more, smaller, mixed developments of market and affordable housing on an appropriate scale for the local community based on identified needs
- 8 Effective broadband should be seen as an essential utility in rural areas and Government should work with rural communities to ensure all areas have access to 10Mbps by 2013 and 40Mbps by 2015.
- 9 Broadband delivery must be future proofed by using all available technologies so that roll out recognises changing user needs and adopts new technology to provide universal next generation broadband
- 9b Universal coverage of 3G mobile telephony, including remote rural and coastal areas, must be provided by 2013 on all networks and the planned roll out of 4G technology must ensure universal access is available from the inception of these new services
- 10 Research and development should be undertaken into new models of sustainable rural land and

water management systems

- 11 Environmental management schemes should to be developed so that they deliver greater community engagement and increased social and environmental outcomes
- 12 Climate change action plans should promote innovative ways for rural communities to reduce carbon emissions by changing behaviour, by reducing the need for transport and through low carbon models of development
- 13 Climate change plans should include and promote innovative ways in which rural communities can prepare for climate change impacts
- 14 New creative solutions are needed to provide constructive activities, transport and information for rural young people (particularly 14-17 year olds), to help them fulfil their potential
- 15 The provision of rural services in villages and market towns should be increased through multi-agency approaches between the public sector, voluntary and commercial providers, whilst recognising that in some circumstances, it is better to provide transport to assist access to centralised specialist provision (e.g. complex health needs)
- 16 Preventative health care needs to take account of the different solutions needed for rural communities
- 17 The East of England Rural Forum should recruit some younger members and work with youth organisations to encourage debate on rural issues as they affect young people
- 18 Community planning processes need to be strengthened so that they can deliver more holistic local statements of need which can be used to inform Local Development Frameworks

Appendix 2 - Feedback from Workshops on Five Themes

Broadband and Telephony Services

Recommendations and feedback

| Ref. | Recommendation wording as originally published, with suggested changes in red | Comments |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Ch 4 Recm. 8 | Effective broadband should be seen as an essential utility in rural areas and Government should work with rural communities to ensure all areas have access to 10Mbps by 2013 and 40Mbps by 2015. | Disagreement on target, with two workshops arguing for higher target to meet euro standard of 50Mbps but may need stepped process to achieve this, last group argued to concentrate on 2Mbps for everyone by 2013 but future proofed to allow superfast broadband |
| Ch 4 Recm. 9 | Broadband delivery must be future proofed by using all available technologies so that roll out recognises changing user needs and adopts new technology to provide universal next generation broadband | Redraft to stress best available infrastructure within cost and availability constraints. Maybe need to split out a separate recommendation on mobile telephony |
| Ch 4 Recm 9b | Universal coverage of 3G mobile telephony, including in remote rural and coastal areas, must be provided by 2013 on all networks and the planned roll out of 4G technology must ensure universal access is available from the inception of these new services | Additional action |

Update on current challenges and issues

Key areas raised by consultation were:

- **Access** - equality of access at fair price is the key issue. Poor rural service is major reason for UK's demotion from 2nd to 33rd globally in terms of broadband service quality and in itself may stop the UK achieving the target of having the best superfast broadband in Europe by 2015.
- **Advocacy** - need more awareness raising on the impact of poor broadband on business, lost time, extra costs to rural residents, poor morale and frustration, lack of access to remote learning and health monitoring. All these areas need promoting to government and local authorities. A toolkit needs promoting to help communities take action themselves. Local community plans are really important in identifying broadband requirements.
- **Speed** - CLA promoting the need for superfast broadband and government strategy is to have best superfast broadband in Europe by 2015.

- **Funding** - BDUK, RDPE funds need investigating and acting on quickly. Communities should also investigate piggybacking on other businesses with high speed broadband e.g. engineers or education.
- **Mobile access** - mobile access is constrained by planning which is obstructing mast erection. However, is it a realistic goal to expect mobile coverage to improve before new spectrum licences are in place? Maybe there is a need to draft a separate recommendation on mobile telephony?
- **Case studies** - in Brandon local action is being taken; Rutland is the best larger example; and Alston, a village in Lancashire, has achieved local speeds of up to 100MBps to 1,000 homes. In Essex, the Maldon project worked because the LSP led the programme with £35k fund to start the process and get a commercial supplier on board such that demand exceeded all expectations.

Actions proposed

Action areas proposed were grouped into three areas:

- **Quantify demand** - there is a need to quantify the demand in rural areas so that the case for provision can be made, In doing this, it is essential to use surveys which are presented in layman's terms, i.e. what they want to do, not do they want xxMBps over yy system. This process should include rural broadband partnerships and be facilitated by ALCs, LEAs and County Councils working together. It is important to ensure all local voices are heard in the consultation process and proposed actions must explain how they will benefit communities and businesses. The quantification of demand must explain the economic and social benefits which can be delivered.
- **Delivery** - the region's rural areas should seek to get the maximum possible share of the BDUK fund (£538m 2013-16 and then £150m/annum for 2 further years). The region should also look to maximise the opportunities provided by the £20m community broadband fund ('Songbird') run as part of the RDPE programme. This should explore how BDUK, RDPE and ERDF funds can be aligned and flexed to achieve the maximum impact. Council planning departments must support the extension of the mobile network by facilitating new masts or by sharing existing masts and in this area the EERF role could be to promote this with UAs and CCs. There is a need to identify a separate mobile telephony action as the issues are different.
- **Advocacy, sharing and lobbying** - there is demand to set up a regional EERF sub-group to share best practice on how to roll out rural broadband. This should provide a strategic overview of roll out by CCs, share information across the region and monitor and co-ordinate delivery. One key initial area of work would be to lobby DEFRA to achieve a blanket state aid block exemption for broadband partnerships as soon as possible to avoid 200k euro de minimus thresholds stopping projects.

Economic Growth and Skills

Recommendations and feedback

| Ref. | Recommendation wording as originally published, with suggested changes in red | Comments |
|------------------|---|---|
| Ch 1 Recm. 1 | Development policy and the planning system must place more emphasis on achieving sustainable rural communities by facilitating the growth of rural villages and market towns so that they fulfil their long term potential | Major concern that new planning rules and localism may make this even harder to achieve due to nimbyism |
| Ch 2 Recm. 2 | Economic development policy must focus on creating rural jobs at a faster rate than the increase in the rural population of working age, with a target to grow the East of England rural economy at 3% per annum compared to the RES target of 2.3% for the whole economy | Not challenged |
| Ch 2 Recm. 3 | Resources need to be targeted at promoting the skills and aspirations of the young and unskilled in rural areas so that they can fully engage in the growth agenda | Focus on young & unskilled accepted but must try to support everyone to gain new skills. Provision must support vocational & academic courses |
| Ch 2 Recm. 4 | Funding allocations for training/learning provision must recognise the need to increase flexibility of training provision in rural areas and to close the gap in skills performance in more remote rural areas | New flexibilities & budget cuts may cause providers to withdraw from rural areas due to higher costs |
| Ch 7 Recm. 14 | New creative solutions are needed to provide constructive activities, transport and information for rural young people (particularly 14-17 year olds), to help them fulfil their potential | Transport, information & guidance critical to helping young people progress and develop |

Update on current challenges and issues

Key areas raised by consultation were:

- **Training budgets** - whilst welcoming the new flexibility to be more responsive to local needs, consultees were very concerned that given the 25% cut in training budgets and a more restrictive approved list of courses on which funds can be used, rural areas may see actual provision cut. Consultees were sceptical that providers would meet rural needs given higher delivery costs unless held to account to do so.
- **Access to training and employment** - given the likely retrenchment of mainstream training provision to larger sites, there is an urgent need to be creative in promoting access via transport solutions to get learners to provision, outreach where viable and by engaging local businesses and other major employers to provide local solutions or to develop demand. Less bureaucracy is essential to engage businesses and employers and supported provision must be vocational relevant. The ability to use

non-accredited trainers within teaching teams would help to increase relevance and participation by employers and businesses.

- **Targeting** - the key issue in skills targeting is flexibility and whilst the young in particular should be targeted, this should not be to the exclusion of other groups who also need to develop new skills. Enterprise education, which is critical for the growth of employment in the commercial or social enterprise sectors, should start in school and continue into FE, HE and adult education. Must develop skills targeting which encourages business to be more closely linked to providers and learners to provide better work placements, additional resources and expertise.
- **Business support** - targeted business support is important to help new business start ups and growth. Consultees are sceptical that the plans for mentoring will work in the face of big cuts in enterprise agencies and withdrawal of local Business Link support.
- **LEPs** - great concern was expressed that some LEPs don't fit natural rural boundaries or homogeneous rural areas and that this may impact on their ability to engage with rural issues.
- **Rural business clusters** - there was widespread support for the concept of developing small business parks or clusters to drive forward a rebalancing of the economy. Gt Barfield was cited as a good exemplar, 1,000 people of whom 1/3 work in village, 1/3 out commute and 1/3 young/old etc. This community has created a small business park, which has good links to schools, education and excellent broadband. It was stressed that there is a need to support the community to understand the benefits of local employment growth and also to give it incentives. Concerns were expressed that planning is too restrictive for these types of development, rates were often too high and the Community Infrastructure Levy may penalise rural development.

Actions proposed

Action areas proposed were grouped into three areas:

- **LEPs** - there is a need to work with LEPs to ensure that they have clear policies and plans for rural economic growth which is supported by detailed understanding of the potential in rural areas e.g. small business units, business parks, home based or knowledge businesses.
- **Skills and business growth advocacy** - there is a need to develop very clear data to identify rural economic opportunity, training needs and issues, which can be promoted with LEPs, Colleges, Councils and other local providers. Whilst part of this can be done by the LEPs themselves (using support from the SFA and similar bodies), there is a need for rural communities and businesses to ensure their views are taken on board. The EERF and local county rural partnerships have a key role to play in rural advocacy but must focus on opportunities and not just problems. There is also a key role for the VCS and businesses in helping to solve skills needs through training provision, work placements and advocacy of the benefits of training. Training in enterprise is the critical issue at present to develop more private sector jobs.
- **Workspace** - there is a need to develop workspace on a flexible basis. In some cases it is better to cluster these workspaces into small business parks to help sustainability and cut costs. Councils must ensure rateable values are realistic to attract new businesses. There should be good links to education and training, business support and access to finance.

Housing and the Built Environment

Recommendations and feedback

| Ref. | Recommendation wording as originally published, with suggested changes in red | Comments |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Ch 3 Recm. 5 | Economic development policy must encourage the creation of more rural workspace to facilitate an increase in rural jobs | Must be linked to housing provision, broadband and other services and planning must be more flexible |
| Ch 3 Recm. 6 | The government should review the treatment of refurbishment in relation to VAT to encourage more rural properties to be brought back into commercial, community or full time residential use | |
| Ch 3 Recm. 7 | Provide more, smaller mixed developments of market and affordable housing on an appropriate scale for the local community based on identified needs | Consider changing to “Develop low impact housing on an appropriate scale for the local community based on its identified needs” |

Update on current challenges and issues

Key areas raised by consultation were:

- **Affordable housing** - target the drive for affordable housing in communities up to 5,000 people. Ability to charge up to 80% of market rent for affordable housing may make them more expensive in many areas and create problems. There is a need to do housing need surveys faster, link them to neighbourhood strategies and ensure they are reflected in the LDF to create a joined up approach.
- **Workspace** - need to encourage a simplified planning system which promotes economic growth through the provision of workspace, including both starter and larger ‘move on’ units. Many new businesses need serviced offices or you can successfully group businesses into small business parks e.g. Diss Business Park which can provide shared back office services. It is important to provide specialist business advice alongside workspace. Need simplified planning framework to help facilitate economic growth. Short term rent or rate relief helps to get businesses started.
- **Balanced growth** - community plans should promote balanced growth (economic, housing and social) but this requires active facilitation. The Localism Bill should encourage more mixed development but there is concern that the Bill will lead to a lack of strategic planning for major infrastructure (e.g. sewage plants, power stations, transport links) and lead to more nimbyism. There is a need to review rates for community buildings.
- **Incentives** - VAT relief for refurbishment should be targeted on workspace, community owned assets or affordable housing (not holiday lets) and should be aligned with needs identified in the neighbourhood plan.
- **Environmental performance** - need to phase in green house building specifications so that housing associations can afford upgrades. The Green Deal (late 2012) could help with energy and utility bills.

Case studies:

- Tivetshall, Norfolk - mixed development with cross subsidy,
- Thaxted, Essex - 44 affordable houses with child nursery and an exception site to provide local employment, West Mersey - 49 serviced units providing work.
- Debenham, Suffolk - community led and based on dementia care within 4 miles, has also created jobs and freed up existing housing for use by other members of the community.
- Capel St Mary, Suffolk is a large village with good facilities but a growing number of older people in the parish with a need for sheltered accommodation and no local provision. Given the relatively small number of units needed on any site in a rural community, it is vital that the mix of housing and the appropriate support services are put in place. With the support of the parish council, a housing need survey was sent to approximately 1,200 households by the RHE for Suffolk ACRE that identified a significant requirement for sheltered housing. With funding from the Homes & Communities Agency, Orwell Housing developed a scheme of 32 units on a rural exception site 2010. The sheltered housing allows older residents to remain in the parish long term, near to family and friends and to continue their participation in the community. The housing development has also provided benefits to the village, helping to maintain a balanced community, local services and social interaction. It is anticipated that many of the properties vacated by the older people will be sold to younger families who can contribute to the continued sustainability of the local community. It has also provided local employment opportunities for care workers and domestic staff.

Actions proposed

Action areas proposed were grouped into four areas:

- **LEPs** - need to work with LEPs to promote the role of rural economic growth and the need for workspace to facilitate this. Need to review local plans to focus on local housing needs and jobs growth. Must focus on increased affordable housing supply and jobs with targets set & monitoring of both housing and jobs growth to achieve balanced development. The planning inspectorate must support balanced growth and community plans should be used more robustly to feed into local plans.
- **Community planning** - there is a need to develop more Quality Parish Councils which take a broad view of development needs to reflect both housing and job requirements. There is a role for housing enablers and housing needs surveys to be used by and fed into Councils (all levels), LEPs and RCCs. Community planning which is broadly based should be used to promote balanced growth, needs local champions to promote it (e.g. RCCs) and should link to the Localism Bill.
- **Transport** - it is essential to create transport to link communities to the physical facilities, jobs, training and services they need.
- **Government** - VAT relief for refurbishment of redundant buildings is needed to create new workspace, community buildings and affordable homes.

Sustainable Development

Recommendations and feedback

| Ref. | Recommendation wording as originally published, with suggested changes in red | Comments |
|------------------|--|--|
| Ch 5 Recm. 10 | Research and development should be undertaken into new models of sustainable rural land and water management systems | Maybe a national concern and not for action locally. Water issues are already being actioned locally. |
| Ch 5 Recm. 11 | Environmental management schemes should to be developed so that they deliver greater community engagement and increased social and environmental outcomes | Allotment schemes are very popular. This issue is in tune with Big Society concept, localism and the development of Transition Towns. This is the best area for EERF to concentrate on. |
| Ch 6 Recm. 12 | Climate change action plans should promote innovative ways for rural communities to reduce carbon emissions by changing behaviour, by reducing the need for transport and through low carbon models of development | Reducing fuel use is the key to sustainability. EERF action in this area needs to flow from recommendation 11 Others saw this as a first priority area |
| Ch 6 Recm. 13 | Climate change plans should <i>include and</i> promote innovative ways in which rural communities can prepare for climate change impacts | EERF action in this area needs to flow from recommendation 11. Other groups felt this was already largely being accomplished. Maybe needs jargon reduced for publicity |

Update on current challenges and issues

Key areas raised by consultation were:

- **Transport and need to travel** - there is a need to make change of use of homes easier so more people can work from home to reduce commuting. Rural diversification needs to be developed faster to increase jobs and to reduce the need to commute but both planning and rates can constrain diversification. Transport remains a key issue, with a need for public transport to get people efficiently to services, training providers and jobs. Private transport being badly affected by fuel costs. Tourism is a potential growth industry but need to focus on low carbon forms of tourism.
- **Localism** - the Localism Bill is an opportunity for local communities to shape their future to increase sustainability. However, there is concern that the 'upper tiers' see that they are delivering on

localism – but is this really what the government intended to happen? Don't 'lower level' people really want to accept this responsibility? Facilitation is required to guide local decision making processes in relation to sustainability. Parish plans should be statutory and clearly linked to LDFs. Suffolk CC shifting from top-down decisions to matching provision to local requirements.

- **Community engagement in the environment** - there is concern that local government thinks they can speak for people without consulting them and that the Big Society is more focused on urban or deprived areas. Faith groups are still strong in rural areas and can lead change. Community owned assets can be good local adverts for sustainability principles. Some community projects have struggled where a strong strategic plan has been developed and funded but this has not been matched by delivery because of a lack of community engagement from the start.
- **Local community plans** - climate change adaptation needs to be included in parish plans but a big concern that no monitoring is taking place. Convening groups to discuss community plans for sustainability needs facilitation with expert help and more support to implement effective measures.
- **Food production** - development of food production is of growing importance and work on the environment has to respect this, so need more research on sustainable forms of production. Some livestock production is not economic at present. There is a need to encourage local supply chains both in the region and to London for all products including food.
- **Energy costs** - green deal should support renewable heat. Need to monitor energy use. Many rural households in fuel poverty. EU fines if climate change targets not met: may mean re-introduction of measurement at LA level?

Actions proposed

Action areas proposed were grouped into four areas:

- **Community Plans** - community plans must focus on sustainability. Need for a facilitator role focussing on what the community wants and who appreciates how ideas 'evolve' slowly and steadily in small communities. Local parish councils can support with small amounts of funding. Need to know where to go for other sources of funding. Participatory budgeting approach between parish, district and county: joint approach to overcome roadblock in parish plan progress.
- **Energy** - Action is needed to both reduce use (e.g. insulation or more local economies) and to develop new sources (e.g. local renewable developed utilising the Renewable Heat Incentive). Fuel poverty issues are going to be a major challenge going forward and a constraint on business.
- **Transport** - need to both reduce the need to travel (by re-localising the economy and services) as well as developing more sustainable forms of private and community transport.
- **Food production** - research on sustainable food production is needed, inc. sustainable supply chains, via Universities & Colleges but is a national issue. Need to develop local food production based on best sustainability practice. HE delivery in local communities proposed.

Access to Services

Recommendations and feedback

| Ref. | Recommendation wording as originally published, with suggested changes in red | Comments |
|------------------|--|---|
| Ch 7 Recm. 15 | The provision of rural services in villages and market towns should be increased through multi-agency approaches <i>between the public sector, voluntary and commercial providers</i> , whilst recognising that in some circumstances it is better to provide transport to assist access to centralised specialist provision (e.g. complex health needs) | Clarify that multi-agency can include VCS, public and commercial providers <i>Right to Challenge</i> will be important in the future in rural areas LEPs unlikely to help much on this area |
| Ch 7 Recm. 16 | Preventative health care needs to take account of the different needs of rural communities | Key issue is broadband for virtual access or outreach to the community |
| Ch 8 Recm. 17 | The East of England Rural Forum should <i>recruit some younger members and</i> work with youth organisations to encourage debate on rural issues as they affect young people | Not sure this recommendation is needed, instead get young on EERF Why pick out the young; Forum needs full mix Needs long term investment |
| Ch 8 Recm. 18 | Community planning processes need to be strengthened so that they can deliver more holistic local statements of need which can be used to inform Local Development Frameworks | Must also be living documents, which are updated and used and must link to LDF. Community asset register is part of Localism Bill Can take too long but worthwhile, although cannot be delivered without council grants to support process Need to be broader in scope |

Update on current challenges and issues

Key areas raised by consultation were:

- **Clustering** - there is a need for collaboration and clustering locally to get people to work together. However, must accept that not everywhere can have everything, so planning at community level should focus on clustering and remove the 'just my parish' view. Town and parish councils should work together to choose what to deliver in partnership.

- **Community planning** - community plans must look at services within local plans. Different sizes of communities have different needs, don't try to treat them all the same, so there is a need to consult and engage communities in helping to design appropriate interventions.
- **Community delivery** - there is a need to strengthen the role of volunteers and to recognise the mental health benefit of social interaction. Safer neighbourhood teams and rural special constables have been shown to work well and tackle a wide range of issues beyond traditional policing role. New GP consortia may help to clarify local needs at the community level.
- **Transport** - remains a critical issue for many people and innovative solutions are needed. Newer community led programmes such as car sharing or demand responsive transport can help. Good examples of transport co-ordination include ambulance service co-ordination of patient pick-up, community transport brokerage services and the lessons from this need to be extended. Transport can be restricted by insurance which controls user groups but collaborative systems, which pool different types of user, can help to sustain provision.
- **Young people and skills** - there is a major and growing problem with NEETS, which is exacerbated by the withdrawal of communication by official services. There is a need to promote the role of education much more strongly both amongst the young and all rural people, as well as taking action to raise life expectations and aspirations.

Actions proposed

Action areas proposed were grouped into four areas:

- **Clustering** - there is a need to focus on both clustering to help with design of community scale solutions which work and then to implement them collaboratively. This should include community organisations, councils, police, RCCs, faith groups, transport, libraries, health services and the private sector (e.g. pubs, shops, POs). Clustered solutions should use community owned enterprises where possible and do pilots to develop new models of collaboration and will often involve investing to get long term results. Complex areas such as preventative health care needs to reach out into the community and be delivered locally, for example through schools.
- **Volunteers** - need to support increased volunteering through direct engagement, a reduction in red tape and by providing co-ordination for volunteers. Faith groups and safer neighbourhood teams could lead in visiting and engaging with volunteers in the communities in which they are based.
- **Young people** - making the young a priority is important and will bring benefits to everyone. Through new approaches to transport, increase access to training and employment to motivate and enthuse young people.
- **Transport** - wheels to work schemes are successful and need developing with long term support. Car sharing and demand responsive services need to be supported to meet local needs and more use of pooling of demand for transport to access services, employment and training helps sustainability.