

# East of England Rural Forum Meeting

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12<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Farnham Village Hall, Farnham, Essex

## Attendees:

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**Chair:** John Yates

Frances Bedding	John Buchanan	Stuart Pile
Andrew Budden	David Burch	Sarah Prentice
Jane Burch	John Barker	Mike Seville
Rev'd Dr Tony Barker	Kate Belinis	David Thompson
Mick Carr	John Carrick	John Day
Jason Groco	Pam Forbes	Ed Gregory
Sean Crawford	Brian Hayes	Pat Holtom
Dr Mike Render	Karen Staples	Ian Jacobs
Ann Lovesey	Corinne Meakins	Peter Medhurst
Suzanne Roast	John Mullen	Mick Page
Emma Powlett		

Anna McConnell (Secretariat – Minutes)

## Apologies:

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Lisa Roberts	Richard Woolley	Philip Wilson
Bishop Anthony Russell	Graham Hedger	Paul Wilkinson (abs)
Rev'd Canon John Brown	John Jowers	
Steve Scott	Marie Francis	
Henry Cordeaux	Jim Page	
Anne-Marie Hamilton	Gill Davison	
Martin Collison	David Wood	
John Goodwin	Natalie Tobutt	
Greg Luton	Philip Hayes	
Norman Costin	Fiona Chapman	

## Welcome

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John Yates welcomed everyone to Farnham Village Hall. A discussion of the previous meetings minutes was undertaken and John expressed his thanks for people's contributions to the workshops.

The action points from the previous meeting were also discussed and John asked Suzanne Roast to update the forum on the Post Office closures.

## Post Office Closures Update – Suzanne Roast and Mick Page:

Essex County Council will be offering a short term solution to keep Post Offices open by providing a subsidy. Essex is leading the way on this venture with 29 Post Offices due to close (or already closed) it is an important issue to tackle.

The problems arising with closures is the period of notice required before closing, which was either one or three months, with the same amount of compensation given for each period of notice. As a result of this many Post Office managers were only choosing to work the one month period. This has now been changed so that the minimal period of notice is three months.

Post Office Ltd has proved unforthcoming in sharing information and will only supply the relevant information with the Minister's involvement. It is with the Ministers backing that the whole process is being driven.

The Post Office has been proving difficult to work with on this project as they often remove all the equipment before the council can agree the subsidy. This means that quite often the council have to replace all the equipment in addition to the subsidy. Where possible Essex County Council is endeavouring to keep the Post Offices in the current positions, but with the removal of equipment this is not always possible and they will look into other options.

It was agreed that the forum should fight for the Post Offices that are busy and profitable.

**ACTION:** Suzanne Roast and Mick Page to keep forum up to date on Post Offices, Suzanne Roast composing letter.

## **Sub Groups**

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### **Affordable Housing Andrew Budden:**

1. At the EERF annual conference the EERF and Country Land and Business Association launched a report on land available for exception site housing. The report will be on the EERF website but will also be circulated.
2. Hastoe Housing will launch a report in July.
3. Housing Sub Group nominates to the Regional Assembly who determine how public money should be spent. In particular defend the money being spent in rural areas. Only 11% of the money is going to rural communities with even less being provided to rural communities with a population under 3000 and less. Regular market engagement, allocation of money will be looked at over the next three years.
4. Housing Sub Group is exploring the future of rural housing and requires more evidence from Rural Housing Enablers. A report for consultation will be produced shortly.
5. Matthew Taylor review of the links between employment and housing is also to be discussed. John Yates is to meet with him to enable this discussion.
6. HSG links to regional strategy and regional issues that have a national impact and uses reports from other areas so that they can pull together evidence.

### **Market Towns Pat Holtom:**

Influencing strategy; how much does the forum actually influence and how can we measure that influence? The communication and ideas that have been put forward are to respond to EEDA's rural economy policy and to look at the Rural Delivery framework and re-establish market towns. Market towns have an enormous influence

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on the economy. A representative for most counties and districts will be needed if the forum is to make any impact.

The Regional Spatial Strategy needs the support of agriculture and jobs to work. Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Cambridge are influencing rural communities in particular market towns.

GO-East Regional Cities East to join up, but how do market towns link in to this? Local delivery strategies for EEDA have cited that market towns need support and partnerships to work.

**Learning and Skills John Yates:**

There is currently a train to gain pilot scheme that links up with Business Link and local partnerships. It will influence departments and regional strategy to encourage learning and skills development.

**SFFS Mick Carr:**

Individual members are influencing strategies directly. Marie Francis is playing a major role in influencing policy and delivering influence. Defra's Farming and Food strategy is currently being revised. The industry group is challenging government policy and implementing lots of strategies.

Regional strategy groups are looking at health and procurement while national steering groups from all regions will discuss policies and report back to Defra. The information was in the latest EERF newsletter.

**Feedback from the Chairs/Ministers Meeting:**

There had been a presentation from Defra on the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) from which a paper will be produced on the consultation of a 3 month period. EERF task group will hopefully influence this paper.

The role of EEDA is also going to change dramatically. The Regional spatial strategy and the Regional Economic strategy are to merge to become one more focused strategy. RDA's will be required to show how they can deliver on a local level. Local government will review and challenge the RDA. The EERF can respond to this.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is currently working on the template for good practice for migrant workers.

**ACTION:** John Yates to circulate the response from CLG, along with a paper from EEDA.

Matthew Taylor had attended the meeting and subsequently forwarded a paper containing his draft proposals. This paper highlights various aspects including delivering housing solutions, accessible transport guidance and weakness of local authorities on the way planning policies are made. They are often not strong enough to challenge the planning process.

**ACTION:** Sarah Prentice to circulate the paper from Matthew Taylor.

**RRDF Sarah Prentice:**

The EERF provided feedback on the RRDF Annual Report 2007/08, which John Yates presented to the RRDF Steering Group. This resulted in a template being put together, in consultation with John, and the information from the Annual Report was transferred to the new template. However, there are still gaps as the delivery partners' Action Statements for the reporting period were not focussed on those specific criteria. The RRDF Steering Group now wants to draw a line under 2007/08 and concentrate on 2008/09.

Draft Action Statements are now in place for 2008/09. The EERF's RRDF Task Group now needs to reconvene to look at the draft Action Statements and comment back to the delivery partners. The EERF needs to be aware that the Action Statements are in draft form because the delivery partners are all currently going through business planning and it is difficult for them to confirm the content of their Action Statements at this stage.

The RRDF Steering Group discussed the reporting cycle and felt that the Action Statements and the Annual Report should fall in line with the delivery partners' business planning and annual reporting cycle. This will enable them to give a more coherent response.

#### **EERF Priorities John Yates and Emma Powlett:**

John Yates welcomed and introduced Emma Powlett to the forum as a rural management consultant who had been brought in to co-ordinate the meeting.

Emma led the discussion on identifying what the key priorities are for the EERF and what the outcomes are to be. A plan was outlined for the rest of the day so that these key priorities can be noted down and allocated to individuals so that they can be driven forward. Karen Staples from EERA was then introduced and gave a presentation on the RSS, IRS and RES from EERA's perspective.

**ACTION:** Sarah Prentice to circulate Karen Staples' presentation.

Questions to Karen Staples included; how can you find out if your input has been undertaken from the response submitted from your department? What's the point of circulation if you can not influence?

Ian Jacobs from GO-East was then introduced and provided a presentation on LAA's, what they are, what they do and how they work.

**ACTION:** Sarah Prentice to circulate Ian Jacobs' LAA presentation.

#### **Breakout Session Emma Powlett:**

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During the breakout session people were asked to identify their top priorities for the EERF to tackle. From this session the top ten priorities, in Table 1 below, were identified.

Due to the time constraints in the session only the top six out of the top ten priorities were discussed for their specific outcomes. These are identified in Table 2.

#### **Table 1**

EERF Top 10 Priorities	
1	Spatial
2	Environment
3	RES
4	LAA
5	Housing
6	Social
7	RRDF
8	Health
9	Woodland / MAA
10	SFFS

**Table 2**

Outcomes for Top 6 Priorities			
	What	When	How / Who
<b>Spatial</b>	Reactive	<b>May 2008</b> – Existing RSS Published <b>Jul 2008</b> – 1 <sup>st</sup> Consultation on RSS <b>Sep 2009</b> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Consultation on Spatial Strategy <b>Feb 2010</b> – RSS published	Rural Action East. David Wood, Corinne Meakins. ERRA regional plan.
<b>Environment</b>	Proactive E.G: Issue paper	ASAP	Sub Group EERF
<b>RES</b>	Reactive. Participate in Groups	June / July 2008	Individual EERF members
<b>LAA</b>	Proactive Influencing Thematic groups	Now	County Forums RCC
<b>Housing</b>	Proactive	Now	Housing Sub Group
<b>SNR</b>	Reacting to Consultation document.	March to June 2008	Task and finish group

### Annual General Meeting

#### Review by John Yates:

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John Yates gave a brief review of the year and his views on the accomplishments and ideas for the forum, identifying in particular his desire to make the forum a debating chamber and the key issues that the forum has influenced including position papers. The forum also fed into the report for housing for the North West which has in turn influenced Matthew Taylor's review.

The future of the forum looks good and with the outcomes from the breakout session can be pushed forward to achieve more. In particular John highlighted working with county forums and stakeholders to discuss common issues.

#### Election Results:

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John Yates and Andrew Budden are to resume their positions as Chair and Vice Chair respectively, while Pat Holtom will join them as the new second vice chair for the forum.

#### Any Other Business:

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John Buchanan expressed his thanks to the forum on behalf of the Town and Parish Councils for allowing them to have one representative per county.