



Vibrant Rural Communities: Action Plan

Delivering the Recommendations

Spring 2011

The East of England Rural Forum believes that rural communities, their people, businesses & the natural environment are an essential part of the economic recovery. The Forum's recent paper*, "*Vibrant Rural Communities*", 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;
- **Rural economic growth**, so that rural job creation matches the increase in the rural population;
- **A positive approach to demographic change** to support all ages within the rural population.

In spring 2011, the Forum ran a consultation process to develop an Action Plan to develop and prioritise rurally distinctive actions arising from *Vibrant Rural Communities*. In three events, across the East of England, over 120 organisations, local government representatives and individuals debated how to achieve the ambitions in the paper and agreed that action should focus on:

- Local people and communities taking a greater role in planning for their community's success;
- Making the case for rural areas to LEAs, local and central government to secure the resources needed to deliver sustainable rural communities;
- Developing new innovative solutions that can be delivered at a time of budgetary constraint.

The consultation process identified eight actions being to take these priorities forward:

1. Advocacy and Demand for Rural Broadband - to share expertise on how to deliver rural broadband;
2. Broadband Delivery Partnerships - to promote bids for high speed broadband in rural areas;
3. Map and Promote Rural Growth Potential in LEP areas - to make the case for rural economic growth;
4. Develop Rural Enterprise Zones (REZs) - to promote development clusters for local rural job creation;
5. Promote Community Led Planning - to help communities lead planning for sustainable growth;
6. Rural Services Delivery Partnerships - to deliver more multi-agency solutions to sustain rural services;
7. Rural Transport - to review how new approaches to transport can be sustained in the context of cuts;
8. Affordable Housing - to promote ways in which affordable rural housing supply can be increased.

The Forum will also work to:

- Promote the input of Young People into the Rural Forum and local decision making processes;
- Review fuel poverty and consider if the definition should include transport fuel costs in rural areas;
- Promote the role of volunteers in delivering local services and ensure they are supported to do so.

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