

EDITION 6

March 2008



Welcome to the sixth edition of the East of England Rural Forum Newsletter

This is the first newsletter of 2008, a year which promises to be a greater challenge to those involved in rural affairs than 2007. Undoubtedly it will be a year of even more change with a demand for more with less resource; change driven through the sub national review; and continuing issues of climate change, migrant workers and affordable housing amongst others.

The EERF itself is undergoing change as we move to being a more engaging and communicative body placing ourselves in a position to respond to the above and being in a position to influence and shape national, regional and local policies and strategies. This is essential to ensure that mainstream policies are appropriate to rural areas.

Following our last meeting we now have a clear agenda for 2008/09 and I hope that all stakeholders and Members will feel in a position to respond and that their contribution is meaningful. Already our position papers on learning and skills, water resources, and planning have made and are making a difference and the issues raised by the papers are reflected in the draft Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The Rural Housing Sub-Group has contributed nationally and the imminent conference demonstrates our commitment to this issue. These outputs are increasing but we need to be more focussed on whom, where and how we influence. Our next meeting, on the 12th March 2008 at Farnham Village Hall, will address these very points.

In January I attended the annual conference on rural youth, a subject for further debate in the future. The Rural Youth Association will be invited to provide representation on the EERF to ensure we engage youth into all we discuss.

In February the EEDA Strategy group met to consider responses to the consultation on the draft Regional Economic Strategy which represents more substantially rural issues. The RES will be published in the summer.

A revised report from deliverers on the Regional Rural Delivery Framework is awaited following which the Task Group will meet to look forward and discuss the Action Statements for 2008/09. This is a major plank in the responsibilities of the Forum.

On 28th February Rural Affairs Forum (RAF) Chairs met with Ministers, Defra officials, CRC and the Rural Advocate. Defra have been exploring how RAFs and CRC can work more closely and if our budget could be devolved to CRC. Chairs are of a clear opinion that the latter is not appropriate if RAFs are to keep our independence but we have agreed to work towards a concordat and to bring into this the RCC movement and the Government Offices as soon as possible.

We also received a briefing from Defra on the Sub-National Review of economic development and regeneration. There will be greater regionalisation of budgets and objectives. This will be coupled with mechanisms to manage this through RDAs in partnership with, and scrutinised by, local authorities. A single regional integrated plan is envisaged incorporating economic, social and environmental issues and current spatial strategies. Consultation on the proposals will begin in March for three months with anticipated primary legislation being in place before the summer recess of parliament. There is a clear responsibility for the Forum to ensure that the rural issues of the Region are reflected through this process.

We met with Matthew Taylor to discuss a prepared paper on affordable housing. The paper reflected the needs for affordable housing in smaller settlements, concern about the loss of small-scale employment land to open market housing, planning interpretation of former agricultural buildings and the critical loss of support to communities through Rural Housing Enablers was also expressed. Concern about second homes and "dark" villages was also expressed.

At the request of Jonathan Shaw a paper on migrant workers had been prepared which stressed the need for a coherent approach. CLG presented their approach and we will receive a paper on this. An excellence programme is being produced by IDeA with examples of good practice. There are two examples in our Region. These can be accessed through www.idea.gov.uk/migration

We also received the Rural Advocates report. This is now available on www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk

EAST OF ENGLAND RURAL FORUM (EERF)

Newsletter

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