

EDITION 7

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EAST OF ENGLAND RURAL FORUM (EERF)

Newsletter

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

It seems incredible but we are already at the beginning of February and it is August since I wrote last.

The latter half of the last year has concentrated on completing our paper on **Sustainable Rural Growth in the East of England**. This was finalised at our meeting on the 12th December. It has now been sent to the Rural Affairs Minister, the Regional Minister and EEDA. A copy was sent to Forum Members and is posted on our web-site. Coupled with this is an accompanying paper on **Inward Investment in Market Towns and their hinterland**. This was debated in September and the position paper was agreed in December.

In addition the **Learning and Skills paper** issued last year has been updated and will be re-submitted as well as letters to appropriate Ministers with regard to inadequacies in the Train to Gain project caused by the economic turndown.

Affordable housing remains a priority. The minutes of the sub-group are posted on the web-site and consideration is presently being given to consultation on Community Land Trusts.

I would also take this opportunity to welcome Emma Powlett who has now been appointed as The Forum's, Co-ordinator. Welcome aboard Emma!! Emma has already addressed our strategy and communications policy which involves improving our web-site.

We also seek to improve the role of the Forum and a start has been made with CRC. In the middle of January we had a constructive meeting with the County Forums who all unanimously supported the continuation of the Regional Forum structure.

In late November I met the newly appointed Minister for Rural Affairs Huw Irranca Davies. Huw stated that he valued the work of the Regional Fora and welcomed their independence. He wished to continue working together and looked forward to receiving information on specific issues that were unique to each region. He also challenged us to ensure that within the changing local political scenario that we ensured that rural was on the agenda and properly represented. We discussed social deprivation in rural areas and how we could identify where this occurred often in so called affluent areas. The Forum debated this topic at the December meeting and this will be published as soon as possible.

This year we will continue the themes of growth, loss of land through climate change and the impact of the economic downturn. Our Annual Conference on the 4th March will major on this subject but with a positive approach as to what can be done and what the opportunities are at all levels from the government itself to the individual. The event will be held in Lavenham so please put this in your diaries.

Very quickly we will follow on with our AGM and Forum Meeting on the 18th March which will concentrate on food and the supply chain and the impact also of economic constraints.

The agenda beyond March will focus on:

- 10th June 2009- Access:** This is in relation to the growth agenda. It will include looking at the issues that relate to access to services and green space.
- 16th September 2009 - Health:** Access to services and sport, the aging population in the region and their needs.
- 9th December 2009 - Further work on the impact of the downturn of the economy on rural communities:** A follow on from 2009 Annual Conference
- 17th March 2010 - Rural Development:** Through the Leader approach and the remaining Axis 1, 2 and 3 funds from the Rural Development Programme for England assess what has been done on the ground and what else the Forum feel it ought to be supporting. This will tie in with the RDPE midterm review process.

May I take the opportunity to wish you best wishes for the New Year and I look forward to working with you all in the challenging year ahead.

John Yates

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