

## **Rural Communities helping the Region through the Economic Downturn**

**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Lavenham Village Hall, Lavenham, Suffolk.**

### **Conference Report**

#### **Background to the Conference**

The downturn of the economy nationally and globally is impacting on all our lives. The East of England Rural Forum agreed that the Conference this year would focus on assessing the effect of the downturn on the region's economy, how it impacts on rural communities and identifying the key issues to beat the recession.

Hilary Benn, Defra Minister, at the beginning of February 2009 has said that England's rural businesses will be vital in helping the country through tough economic times. He pledged government support for rural communities and businesses, which have diversified and grown in recent years - one in four of all businesses are now in rural areas. Defra is determined to ensure that rural businesses benefit fully from government help during the economic downturn.

Further, Mr Benn added that "Rural businesses play a vital role in our economy, and they will be even more important in future. Although they are rural in location, they are not local in their reach. Rural businesses are more likely to sell to national and export to international markets than their urban counterparts. Rural areas are home to around one million businesses, a quarter of England's total, employing more than 5.5 million people and with a combined turnover of more than £300 billion a year. There are more businesses for every 10,000 people in rural areas than there are in urban areas.

"The recession is making life hard for many communities and businesses. That's just as true of rural communities as it is of our towns and cities. The government's job is to continue to do what we can to help - on bank lending, on support to businesses, and assistance for those who lose their jobs or who are worried about losing their homes and what the future holds.

"I will do everything in my power to ensure that the rural economy is at the heart of the decisions we take in government as we steer a course through the recession - and that rural businesses are able to benefit fully from the help that government is making available."

In line and as response to Mr Benn's comments the purpose of the Conference was to:

- Assess the effect of the downturn on the region's economy and how this impacts on rural communities by identifying the key issues that they are facing.

- Work closely with key regional partners to identify opportunities to support initiatives that will help alleviate the full impact.
- Provide core Government Departments and the Commission for Rural Communities with information and evidence of the positive impact that rural areas can make in order to aid them to develop policy.

The proposed outcomes of the Conference were:

- To gain a full understanding by all delegates of the integral issues that the rural communities will be facing.
- To link closely with, when appropriate, existing bodies and groups and offer support in order to develop initiatives that may alleviate the problems.
- To challenge central and local government on the direction of policy and funding.

### **Summary of Issues raised at the Conference**

**Ron King of Federation of Small Businesses** identified that the characteristics of the 2009 Recession were no different to that of the 30's Depression, the 70's Oil Crisis and the 90's Recession. Survival for businesses was to closely re-examine their business plans, if they had one, work with and take advice from an accountant or a Business Link advice and to not be afraid to get out of business if the three year prognosis was not good. He identified a number of ways that Central and Local Government could go to supporting small businesses in the rural areas.

**Sue Wigley from the CAB** reported that the trends over the past 12 months were showing an increase in enquires about job seekers allowance and redundancy issues. The rural areas fared worse with redundancy than urban. The problem in rural areas is exacerbated by the issues that face those that live in these areas such as poor public transport, fewer public services and local amenities. Sue identified some solutions that would help alleviate the problems facing rural communities including better mortgage rescue, sympathetic debt recovery practices, access to affordable credit, responsive tax credit system and benefits and early access to advice and advisers.

**Peter Couchman from the Plunkett Foundation** explained that whilst there will be major upheaval on the High Street as a result of the recession the shops will come back. In rural communities however recession will have a long term impact and it will be harder for rural enterprises to spring back. He believed that opportunities would be found through social enterprise coalition such as community shops, credit unions, community facilities, Farmers Markets, multipurpose centres and addressing as a community climate change. Peter introduced the concept of the IKEA effect – that is the perception of the value of something is increased if you are involved in its development. Therefore communities will have a greater interest and value if they invest in their own future. They

need advice, support and funding but given this with belief and encouragement rural communities can shape their way forward.

### Responses from County Forums

**John Jowers from Essex** identified that localism was the core to everything and stressed the importance of devolvement of resource and responsibility to the grass roots level. He used the example of Essex County Council supporting 720 projects with a grant of £50 million with a capitalisation of £50 million through devolving the grant to being administered at parish level.

**Sarah Hughes from Bedfordshire** reported that there had been a dramatic increase in redundancies over the last 12 months across the county. Just over 40% were attributed to the county's most rural district. Bedfordshire has responded to the crisis by providing additional funds to support business support, small businesses and the Credit Union. Further support through road shows, skills and training and more redundancy support are being planned.

**Marianne Baker from Cambridgeshire** reported that the County has formal Rural Strategy in place and influences and rural proofs key local, regional and national government documentation. Through work carried out this year Cambridgeshire ACRE has identified a number of issues facing the county's rural economy. They are also seeking to identify solutions.

**John Dixon from Norfolk** stressed the point that as result of a high proportion of the county's population is of pensionable age it is suffering from many now being on fixed incomes. Farming as a sector was not at the moment feeling the pinch too much with good export prices. Rural communities were feeling the recession with post office and shop closures. He felt that to counteract against the decline we must spend local, utilise our existing assets – land, buildings, water and trees - ,support grass root initiatives and enable communities to work together. Small interventions can make a big difference in rural communities.

**Kate Belinis from Hertfordshire** reported that as a county it is difficult to de aggregate urban from rural. She did report that the most rural of districts was experiencing a 50% rise in claimants for benefits as a consequence of redundancy. This is against a 50% drop in job vacancies. The County Council were providing support to all businesses through advice and guidance. The Leader programme will also be able to support diversification of rural businesses.

**John Goodwin from Suffolk** reported that the County were already actioning a substantial number of initiatives to support rural communities in Suffolk. These include an economic summit, a business fayre, extra funding to Credit Unions and support through The Leader

programmes. Existing funding and schemes such as Pub is the Hub were also being promoted.

**Juliet Johnson and Will Aston from the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)** informed the Conference of the work that they are currently undertaking in light of the recession. They are providing monthly reports to Hilary Benn on how rural areas are being affected by the downturn in the economy.

They are also carrying out work on financial inclusion – making sure that individuals have access to appropriate services and advice. They will be doing this by providing funds to increase face to face debt advice and also to extend and support Credit Unions.

**Matthew Dodd from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)** provided an overview of where rural housing is in the middle of the current recession. He scoped out the key issues facing the industry in context against the Governments housing targets for rural areas. His conclusions were that the developments of small scale rented homes are holding up and that the target to complete these schemes appears to be achievable. However, there must remain flexibility to the grant system to home buyers and developers alike. The HCA are setting up a structure to support future housing development in rural areas.

**Carole Randall from Renewables East** focussed her talk on how to tackle fuel poverty and which renewable technology would be most appropriate to use. The opportunities – other than green ones – to the region's economy are that renewables could provide 100,000 jobs on/off shore.

### **Break out session – How can we help?**

The Conference attendees were led through a facilitated session by **Martin Collison and Ann Howlett-Foster**. The conference was asked how we, as representatives of organisations in the region, can help by influencing and stimulating new initiative to support rural communities through this crisis.

Key issues were identified and solutions given in the form of best and most achievable ideas. The full report of this activity is in Appendix 1.

The following sets out the key issues and the most achievable solution. The full report, in appendix 1 identifies also the best ideas and some very novel ones that need further analysis.

| <b>Issue</b>   | <b>Most Achievable Solution</b>   |
|--|---|
| Production versus scenery, increased pressure on the environment.                            | There are opportunities for energy (green) production – biomass, wind, water                          |
| Carbon reduction / renewable energy / Code for Sustainable Homes / transport / road building | New skills: funding is a barrier but there needs to be more focus on <b>relevant</b> skills / looking |

|  |  |
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|  | forward.   |
| Squeeze on services that may deliver – housing.  | Opportunities to develop affordable housing not dependent on S106. RHEs to identify sites  |
| Community empowerment  | Exploit Community Initiative Fund (CIF)<br>Every council to allocate 0.5% budget to community fund   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of capital which businesses have to invest</li> <li>• Customers having less money in their pockets to spend</li> <li>• Lack of funding for SHORT courses</li> <li>• Lack of joined up business support</li> <li>• East of England is conceived by Government as being 'ok' and not warranting special attention/funding</li> <li>• Tendency to try and mainstream when rural differences exist – rural suffers</li> <li>• There is a need to use local produce and businesses, but it doesn't always happen</li> <li>• Honest (food) labelling is needed – e.g. where a product is produced locally and sold locally but has travelled 250 miles in between this should be distinguished from a product with low food miles</li> </ul> | <p><i>Tourism:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The weak pound offers opportunities for tourism</li> <li>• A map of small local businesses for tourists could be produced (e.g. see Midland Meander Project)</li> <li>• Take advantage of 2012 – join together to produce promotional literature aimed at getting people into the region</li> </ul> <p>Work with / lobby local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lobby District and Borough Councils re arrears chasing and re reducing payment periods for small businesses in time of recession</li> <li>• Make procurement easier for small businesses</li> </ul> |

## Conclusions

The purpose of the Conference was to **look more closely at the impact on the region's rural communities as a consequence of the downturn of the economy.**

The key issues to emerge were:

1. Rural communities will find it more difficult to spring back from a recession than their urban counterparts.
2. Evidence is showing that already there are a disproportionate amount of redundant people living in rural areas than urban ones.
3. There are fewer job opportunities in the region than last year compounding the difficulty of living in rural areas for the low income families and older generation with already poor transport systems and few local services.
4. Small businesses are the backbone of the rural economy but are suffering as their chains of businesses are breaking.
5. Small businesses need support to stand back and re-examine their operations in order to move forward.
6. With increasing costs of living and less income earning opportunities, fuel poverty is a major issue in rural areas.
7. Without careful planning and further flexibility from the Government rural social housing development may well stagnate.

By working closely with **key regional partners** we wished to **identify opportunities to support initiatives that will help alleviate the full impact.**

The key areas that were identified that needed future support were:

1. The Government to have more flexibility and consideration to the plight of small business – ranging from deregulating regulations, revisiting the Tax system, developing the remit of the Business Link Adviser to provide actual help rather than guidance and signposting to carrying on with plans to improve key infrastructure in the region.
2. Further resources to enable improved support services for those who need help on debt recovery, redundancy and mortgage rescue.
3. Social enterprise coalition was identified as a positive way that through “on the ground” schemes rural communities could help themselves. Further support through flexible grant systems, advice and access to loans is required. When you connect all three best results are achieved.
4. Enable and encourage local communities to make their own decisions for their own issues. Empower through using local rural advocates and business angels working at parish level. Keep local.

5. Provide more flexibility to the housing grant rate available nationally and to be filtered through when development looks like faltering.

### **Key messages to emerge from the Conference**

Rural is different. The current recession is compounding the issues that those who live and work in or from the rural areas already face such as an increase in travel and transport costs; limited advice and support available; poor access to services; limited housing stock and few job opportunities. The evidence that was given at the Conference show that the regional rural picture is already suffering from job losses and mortgage debt. Small companies are going out of business. A high proportion of the rural population particularly in Norfolk and Suffolk are on fixed incomes and will face the threat of entering fuel poverty.

There is help and support available to businesses in rural areas through Business Link and the CAB. Grants are available from EEDA and the European Union. However, more support is needed at local level working with the rural communities and businesses face to face. The Learning and Skills programme will benefit individuals in the long term but short term courses are needed now to enable people to thrive and survive.

The Government itself has 3 tiers. It should be more flexible in its approach to business and industry. It should re-examine its own systems for tax, and PAYE systems. It should look at deregulating regulations that bind small businesses up. More funds should be devolved to enable social enterprise coalition from the County to Local and Parish levels.

Re-circulating spend in the local economy will be an important way forward. All organisations, agencies and companies should implement local procurement policy. Small interventions can make a great difference.

With belief, encouragement and support rural communities can shape their way forward.

### **Full Conference Proceedings**

The agenda was structured to address the key issues as identified in the Background section of this report. (See appendix 1 for full agenda)

- The keynote presentation by Peter Couchman, Acting Chief Executive of the Plunkett Foundation who spoke about the opportunities that rural communities could achieve with some help and guidance.
- During our remaining morning sessions we heard how businesses had been affected in the region and what support and advice was available.

- Representatives from the six County Forums each spoke on the issues their counties were facing and what was being done to support their rural communities.
- In the afternoon we focussed on more social issues arising out of the recession having speakers from the CRC, HCA and Renewables East.
- In the last session of the afternoon we invited all delegates to identify key issues and provide innovative solutions.

The conference was attended by just under 100 people including representatives from the county councils, local authorities, town and parish councils, EEDA, the Forestry Commission, GO-East, Housing Associations, Rural Community Councils, Federation of Small Businesses, Country Land and Business Association, SREPs .

### **Key Points from Conference**

The following sets out a narrative of the issues discussed. Further details of the proceedings can be found at <http://www.eerf.org.uk/annual-conference-2009.shtml> in the form of slides and speakers presentations.

### **Small Business – the backbone of the Rural Economy, Ron King, Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses, East Anglia Region**

Ron began by providing a summary as to where we are today and where we are going using the 3 major economic events that have occurred in the last 100 years as evidence.

- The 30's Depression
- The 70's Oil Crisis
- The 90's Recession

All had the same characteristics:

- Rising unemployment
- Depressed stock market
- Falling House prices
- Head in the sand mentality from leading politicians of the day
- Takes 5 years to recover

In order to survive each business must re-examine its operations from the viewpoint that things are likely to get worse and remain worse for three years. They must seek help from an accountant or a business link adviser.

Once the business Plan is in place there are 2 things one can do to survive:

- Increase sale margins ( increase prices or reduce costs)

- Increase sales

Reducing prices are a mistake because the price of elasticity of discretionary expenditure is generally such that you can rarely increase total marginal income by reducing prices. On the High Street cost cutting does not stop shops going bust.

If after these actions have been taken and the business plan still shows 3 years of losses the advice is to sell up and get out while you can – the situation will only get worse.

#### **Areas where Local and National Government can support Businesses**

- Derogate regulations for micro businesses
- Change the penalty culture of HMRC
- Simplify the PAYE and Tax system
- A moratorium on increased rights for employees
- Procurement – make it easier to get public sector business
- Ease rate control
- Review Planning Policy Guidance to support small businesses
- Expand the Business Link remit to provide actual help to SME's not just signposting. Fund through redirection of funds e.g. Underused Learning and Skills budgets
- Raise threshold of VAT to £120,000 and abolish NI on first employee
- Abolish planned increase on Corporation Tax for SME's
- Expand Broadband coverage to all areas
- Follow through with large scale infrastructure developments – e.g. A11 Duelling; A12/A120 improvements
- Improve accessibility into market towns- parking etc
- Develop good dialogue and communications between local authorities and local businesses in order to support them through the crisis.

#### **The Credit Crunch – a view from the CAB Service in the East of England, Sue Wigley, Area Manager, CAB**

Sue outlined the makeup of the CAB concluding that it was fairly good at outreach but possibly not enough for all rural areas. Debt and benefit advice were the main forms of advice sought and given.

Sue reported that the main trends in the region over the past 12 months were:

- *Job seekers allowance* – there had been a massive trend upwards for this benefit. Rural was tracking urban.
- *Redundancy Issues* – There was a higher rate of enquiries from rural than urban.

- *Debt – Mortgage arrears* – There have been less issues over debt in rural areas than urban ones.

The Key issues facing families in rural areas over and above the ones highlighted were:

- Increase in travel and transport costs
- Migrant workers – causing possible increase in community tension
- Limited advice and support available.

Hidden issues include:

- Increase in discrimination( age/sex/race)
- Increase in domestic violence

What else is needed?

- Mortgage rescues – must do more quickly with repossession as last resort
- Provide sympathetic debt recovery practices
- Access to affordable credit – signpost and use the Credit Union movement
- Responsive tax credit system and benefits
- Early accesses to advice and advisers for example in a firm that has announced redundancy.

There are defined rural and urban splits. Further work needs to be carried out to analyse why this is occurring and what can be done to thwart it.

### **Keynote Address: Credit Crunch, an Opportunity, Peter Couchman, Acting Chief Executive, the Plunkett Foundation**

Challenges –In the high street there will be major changes, but will be filled and will come back. There will be recovery. With rural communities the recession will have a long term impact. It will be harder for rural enterprises to spring back.

The ethos of Plunkett was to understand the impact of the industrial revolution on rural communities and through best practice to support these changes for the positive.

Plunkett believed:

- Better farming – Provide best solutions through research and technology
- Better Business - where communities had strong control
- Better Living - rooted in communities

Opportunities would be found through social enterprise coalition:

**Clusters of community shops**

- East of England has just below the average of UK of community run shops. Half are in Suffolk.
- They come when private owners sell up for various reasons communities come forward. This leads to an increase in community shops.
- On average there are 25 volunteers per store. Being part of such an initiative it can provide the opportunity for unemployed to be in a work environment as well as the opportunity to learn new skills and provide a work pattern. Through participation as in a scheme it demonstrates that individuals remain engaged.

**Credit Unions**

- These take a long time to have an impact. The UK is behind most of Europe.

**Community Facilities**

- Swimming pools – in recessions the frills around the edge are often taken away. These in fact are vital and make life bearable. They fit in with the Fit 4 Life Initiative – if people do not use the facilities provided they will lose them.

**Farmers Markets**

- They are reporting economic challenges. They have matured as a sector – but they need to engage further – what is next for them?

**Multipurpose Centres**

- Use a range of entrepreneurs in a village who live there. Identify what else is needed in the community – develop a way to try and get it, e.g. a doctors surgery – some rural villages have dedicated rooms for the GP to use one day a week to service village needs.

**Climate Change**

- Need to invest and take control of energy development operation

Peter introduced the concept of the IKEA effect – that is the perception of the value of something is increased if you are involved in its development. Therefore communities will have a greater interest and value if they invest in their own future.

Rural communities have small in critical mass. The centralised support system cannot cope with their scale. Access from these communities to for example health facilities for the young and old is difficult. Therefore rural communities have three needs:

- Advice
- Grants
- Loans – access to finance

When you connect all three best results are achieved.

Peter concluded that policy makers should not underestimate for example community shop keepers and treat as amateurs. One hundred years ago the founding members of the Co-operative were treated as amateurs. The Co- op now through belief in itself has developed into the worlds 10<sup>th</sup> biggest economy, supports 100 million jobs and is worth \$100 Trillion.

With belief, encouragement and support rural communities can shape their way forward.

## County Forum Response

**John Jowers from Essex** reported to the conference that the Community Initiative Fund that is funded from the Council provided local communities and the voluntary sector to develop local projects that address local needs. To date a budget of £5.5 million has supported 720 projects with a capitalisation of £50 million.

ECC has supported Post Offices, has its own Credit Union and is developing the Essex Bank which will directly fund SME's. The council also has provided small business rate relief. Apprenticeships have been supported to up skill for long term, benefit in new technology schools. The Council supports local procurement.

Localism is the core of everything that the council and county does. Essex policy is 3 tier that works together:

- Parish and voluntary
- Local
- County

**Sarah Hughes from Bedfordshire** underlined Bedfordshire's problem that they have been targeted with generating 50,000 jobs by 2021.

Over the last 12 months just over 900 redundancies have been reported of which 45% have come from Mid Beds. Projects are also experiencing problems in securing job placements. Advice agencies and volunteer bureaux have seen an increase in demand for business start ups.

In response to the crisis Bedfordshire has provided extra funds to make fast track payments to small business suppliers; extended three programmes to support businesses and furthered support to frontline advice agencies to meet rising demand. This is in addition supporting redundancy support services, ESF training programme and a credit Union for Mid Beds, the most rural district in the county. The County has hosted two business focussed events that have reached 200 businesses and will be starting road shows in March. Further focus on skills will be provided; the Bedfordshire CC

website will be expanded; further redundancy support given; provision of an executive job club; tourism businesses will be supported.

The impact of this support has been to date:

- Support approaching 100 businesses
- Help retain /create 100+ jobs
- The capital programme to support construction
- Enhanced access to a range of programmes

**Marianne Baker from Cambridgeshire** began by saying that just under 75% of Cambridgeshire was classed as rural. Cambridgeshire Rural Forum aims to raise awareness of rural issues across the county and influence and rural proof regional and local strategies.

The Forum in September 2008 hosted a Conference “Revive and thrive”. Cambridgeshire ACRE has also produced a report “The recession and credit crunch in Cambridgeshire’s rural economy”. <http://www.cambsacre.org.uk/news-detail.php?eid=17>. The report identified the following issues:

- Deprivation is a growing issue and rural disadvantage is more difficult to quantify because it is not concentrated in specific geographic areas but dispersed across rural settlements. An increase in unemployment could deepen the issues of deprivation and rural poverty.
- There is a marked increase in the number of houses being repossessed and a rise in those entering private rental arrangements. There is a mismatch between the supply of affordable housing and demand.
- Increase in cost of fuel impacting on heating homes and businesses and travelling to work where there are inadequate public transport alternatives.
- Reduction in financial assistance to community infrastructure
- Closure of post offices, village shops and pubs are threatening the sustainability of villages and communities.

**John Dixon from Norfolk** reported that in Norfolk a high percentage of the population were pensioners who were living on fixed incomes. This was having detrimental effects on the economy as their spending power was reducing as prices and taxes on investments increase. Within the land based sector the businesses were not feeling the pinch too much as they were fixed to long term contract prices, good export market. Many who have diversified have done so into tourism which is a sector that is faring well in the recession due to the weak pound against the euro and US Dollar.

Issues facing the rural communities were that the small remote villages were feeling the loss of key service providers through Post Office closures and shops. There has been a fall in outreach services from agencies. The aging population is not spending as much in the local economy.

The messages from Norfolk were:

- Encourage local money to stay local

- Make use of assets – land based industries – redundant farm buildings
- Support more schemes such as Wheels 2 work and Kickstart
- Maintain demographic balance for affordable housing
- Support Communities to work together.

John concluded with saying that small interventions make a big difference in rural communities.

**Kate Belinis from Hertfordshire** reported that Hertfordshire was a thriving place for commuters with good road, rail and air links. As a county it is difficult to de aggregate rural from urban. It is the second most densely populated county with 1.1 million residents of which 80% are employed in the service sector. Hertfordshire Rural Forum is trying to create an environment to support rural affairs.

Kate reported that the recession is having an effect on the county. The claimants for unemployed benefit have risen dramatically this year and are above the national picture, 78%. East Herts, the most rural district, has seen claimants double this year against a 50% drop in job vacancies.

Agencies in the county have produced advice in the form of leaflets and opportunities for retraining and advice on becoming self employed. The County Council is offering an on line A-Z on benefits advice. Hertfordshire also has a Leader Area which will aim to galvanise and support social enterprise.

**John Goodwin from Suffolk** concluded the County report back session. He provided the conference with an insight as to what the County are doing to support rural communities through the recession.

These being:

- An Economic Summit and that identified 43 ideas on how to help our county through the recession. Ten of these ideas were taken up and are being implemented.
- A joint Business to Business fare with the Ipswich and Suffolk Small Business Association to try and help all Suffolk businesses, large and small on April 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Extra funding granted to the CAB and Credit Unions
- A Leader project running with Norfolk working predominantly in the Suffolk Waveney and Norfolk Broads area
- Support and help to allow businesses to form partnerships, as well as purchase and share large seasonal machinery.
- Grants of up to £5000 are available to pubs under “Pub is the Hub” scheme.
- The county is working towards a low carbon economy. This is all helped by businesses working from rural areas, no travelling and a much better place to work from.

## **Where is Rural Housing in the Middle of a Credit Crunch? Matthew Dodd, Policy and Information Manager, Homes and Communities Agency**

The following are key rural housing issues:

- Land acquisition
- Community Support
- High house process, low incomes
- Difficult to develop
- High percentage 2<sup>nd</sup> home ownership
- Sustainability problem

The Government target is to deliver 10,300 homes in settlements with fewer than 3000 populous. However as a result of the recession developers and Housing associations are faced with the following issues:

- Drying up of Section 106 developments
- Extreme tightening and lending
- Shrinking capacity of developers
- Low cost home ownership with restricted staircasing

Small social rented side homes are holding up. The target to completion of small schemes appears to be on target. The opportunities are that there should be more flexibility in the grant rate available nationally and to be filtered through when development looks like faltering. The HCA solutions are to develop a programme approach, develop clusters of settlements; provide affordable housing workshops; support the Regional Rural Champions, the Rural Housing Advisory Group and the Rural Affordable Housing Project.

## **Renewable Energy Solutions for Rural Areas, Carole Randall, Renewables Deployment Manager, Renewables East**

Carole informed the Conference that Fuel Poverty was defined as spending more than 10% of a household's disposable income on hot water and heating. With regard to CO2 emissions nuclear energy was the cleanest and electricity the worst. Fossil fuel provided 30% of CO2 emissions.

Renewable energy power is low or zero carbon technology. In the region suppliers were all made up from SMEs and were a valuable employer and distributor of income within the region. In the East of England region there is the potential for 100,000 jobs from on/off shore sectors.

Carole identified that in order to reduce the need for energy it must be used more efficiently. We must use supply from renewable resources. She outlined the different types of technology that

could be applied from solar to wind to bio mass. The technology had to match the appropriate use. Grants are available to commercial and private companies to drive down the capital costs of installation.

The key points to ensure a reduction in fuel poverty will be through the lowering of energy bills and lowering CO2 emissions.

## Questions and Answers

*Question:* How do we get through to people we can change?

*Answer from Ron King:* Representatives from different agencies have routes to government. They/we must lobby on all these points.

*Question:* We live in an age where everything is supplied via grants. Does the grant application process really represent best value for money for business? It seems only to provide employment for highly paid officials?

*Answer from John Jowers:* We are living in the most centralised state in Europe. We should devolve locally. Best decisions are determined at the local level.

*Question:* A lot depends on enthusiasm and initiative of an individual particularly in a village. The Herts Rural Forum is asking for help. Most things happen where there is a structure in place. What can be done to support the structure?

*Answer from John Yates:* The EERF has given each county Forum £1000 this year to support and develop the County structures. Future funding is uncertain but the Regional Forum will continue to support each County Forum, although not necessarily in terms of cash – the two are interlinked and cannot achieve what they set out to without each other.

Appendix 1: East of England Rural Forum Conference 2009 – **Summary of Best and Most Achievable ideas**

| <b>Focus</b>       | <b>Issue</b>   | <b>Response</b>  <i>Best ideas</i>  <i>Most achievable ideas</i>   |
|--------------------|--|--|
| <b>Environment</b> | Production versus scenery, increased pressure on the environment.                            |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are opportunities for energy (green) production – biomass, wind, water</li> <li>• Opportunities for food production in the region</li> <li>• Independent communities – needing a holistic approach – look at the big picture</li> <li>• Village employment zones – people who live and work in local areas will spend locally</li> <li>• Focus on development on non tourist honey pot areas to increase tourism spends.</li> </ul> |
|                    | Carbon reduction / renewable energy / Code for Sustainable Homes / transport / road building |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local food production – change consumer behaviour. BUT there is an issue with who uses farmers markets etc (it’s not generally the people that live near them)</li> <li> • New skills: funding is a barrier but there needs to be more focus on <b>relevant</b> skills / looking forward.</li> </ul>   |

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|------------------|---|--|
| <b>Community</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unemployment</li> <li>▪ Migration out of skills – in job search</li> </ul>                       |  Better broadband – not to travel. Need outreach mobile services. Spend more – public sector and do it better   |
|                  | Centralisation of services and consolidation  |  Need outreach mobile services. Spend more – public sector and do it better   |
|                  | Squeeze on services that may deliver – housing. Opportunities to develop affordable housing not dependent on S106. RHEs to identify sites |  Opportunities to develop affordable housing not dependent on S106. RHEs to identify sites  |
|                  | Community empowerment   |   Exploit Community Initiative Fund (CIF)<br>Every council to allocate 0.5% budget to community fund |

| <b>Focus</b>    | <b>Issue</b>   | <b>Response</b> <span style="float: right;"> <i>Best ideas</i>    <i>Most achievable ideas</i></span>   |
|-----------------|--|---|
| <b>Business</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of capital which businesses have to invest</li> <li>• Customers having less money in their pockets to spend</li> <li>• Lack of funding for SHORT courses</li> <li>• Lack of joined up business support</li> <li>• East of England is conceived by Government as being ‘ ok’ and not warranting special attention/funding</li> <li>• Tendency to try and mainstream when rural differences exist – rural suffers</li> <li>• There is a need to use local produce and businesses, but it doesn’t always happen</li> <li>• Honest (food) labelling is needed – e.g. where a product is produced locally and sold locally but has travelled 250 miles in between this should be</li> </ul> | <p><i>Tourism:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> • The weak pound offers opportunities for tourism</li> <li>• A map of small local businesses for tourists could be produced (eg see Midland Meander Project)</li> <li>• Take advantage of 2012 – join together to produce promotional literature aimed at getting people into the region</li> </ul> <p><i>Work with / lobby local authorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> • Lobby District and Borough Councils re arrears chasing and re reducing payment periods for small businesses in time of recession</li> <li>• Make procurement easier for small businesses</li> </ul> |

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
|  | distinguished from a product with low food miles  |   |  |
|  | Restrictions /barriers to accessing grants and funding and the right help.  | ● | Reducing restrictions – across the board on restrictions of all regulations for business and access to grant funding made simpler.         |
|  | Planning: restrictions prevent diversification of farms and rural businesses.   | ● | Simplify the planning process, make it a “yes” culture not a “no” culture. Improve communications between businesses/ farmers and planners |
|  | Access to Services - if they can't get to services, how can we get the services to them. Lack of GPs in rural areas concern about move to large distant health centres. | ● | Multi use community buildings including shop, GP service etc.  |
|  | Parish Councils aren't always aware of their own powers and how to use their precept  | ● | Better use of Precepts and improving Parish Councils knowledge base of powers etc.   |

East of England Rural Forum Conference 2009 – **Group work outputs.**

| <b>Environment Group 1</b> |   |   |                  |                             |
|----------------------------|---|---|------------------|-----------------------------|
|                            | <b>Issue (grouped)</b>  | <b>Opportunities / How can we address the issue?</b>  | <b>Best idea</b> | <b>Most achievable idea</b> |
|                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production versus scenery</li> <li>• Increase in pressure on environment</li> </ul>                | <p><b>Production and the environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are opportunities for energy (green) production – biomass, wind, water</li> <li>• Opportunities for food production in the region</li> <li>• Independent communities – needing a holistic approach – look at the big picture</li> <li>• Village employment zones – people who live and work in local areas will spend locally</li> <li>• Focus on development on non tourist honey pot areas to increase tourism spends.</li> </ul> |                  | ●                           |
|                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in Co2 emissions</li> <li>• Reduction in consumption will mean a reduction in</li> </ul> |   |                  |                             |

|  |   |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
|  | <p>pollution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower conservation more sustainable</li> </ul>        |  |  |  |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase reduce repair reuse recycle</li> </ul>                        |  |  |  |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create sustainability in planning mindset</li> </ul>                   |  |  |  |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convince people to appreciate and increase public awareness</li> </ul> |  |  |  |

| Environment Group 2 |  |  |   |   |
|---------------------|--|--|---|---|
|                     | Issue (grouped)  | Opportunities / How can we address the issue?  | Best idea   | Most achievable idea  |
| 1                   | Carbon reduction / renewable energy / Code for Sustainable Homes / transport / road building | Production of new 'kit'  |   |   |
|                     |  | New skills: funding is a barrier but there needs to be more focus on <b>relevant</b> skills / looking forward  |   |  |
|                     |  | Employment growth  |   |   |
|                     |  | Opportunity to invest in / create new businesses in biomass production   |   |   |
|                     |  | Development of the biofuels sector   |   |   |
|                     |  | Local food production – change consumer behaviour. BUT there is an issue with who uses farmers markets etc (it's not generally the people that live near them) |  |   |
|                     |  | Capital infrastructure investment (roads and coasts) – new skills / jobs / technology / renewable energy opportunities   |   |   |
| 2                   | Growth areas   | Slowing of the rate of growth  |   |   |

|                          |   |  |                   |                              |
|--------------------------|---|--|-------------------|------------------------------|
|                          |   | More opportunities for housing associations to get funding for affordable housing and for using empty stock          |                   |                              |
|                          |   | Houses, and associated infrastructure, built where people want them  |                   |                              |
| 3                        | Coastal erosion                         | See number 1   |                   |                              |
| 4                        | Reduction in environmental projects     | Better cases made for funding; funding sought from alternative sources   |                   |                              |
|                          |   | Make it easier for people to get funding – i.e. by relaxing rules; quicker timescales; increasing intervention rates |                   |                              |
| <b>Community Group 1</b> |   |  |                   |                              |
|                          | <b>Issue</b>                            | <b>Opportunities / How can we address the issue?</b>   | <b>Best ideas</b> | <b>Most achievable ideas</b> |
| 1                        | Transport – access – work               | Car share schemes / Wheels to Work. Utilise transport already in existence – co-ordination                           |                   |                              |
| 2                        | Unemployment                            | Better broadband – not to travel. Need outreach mobile services. Spend more – public sector and do it better         | ●                 |                              |
| 3                        | Migration out of skills – in job search | Better broadband – not to travel. Need outreach mobile services. Spend more – public sector and do it better         | ●                 |                              |

|    |   |  |   |   |
|----|---|--|---|---|
| 4  | Slow down – small businesses (knock on effect)  |  |   |   |
| 5  | Loss of public funding for local projects   |  |   |   |
| 6  | Community led planning  |  |   |   |
| 7  | Centralisation of services and consolidation  | Need outreach mobile services. Spend more – public sector and do it better |  |   |
| 8  | Social and domestic tensions  |  |   |   |
| 9  | Different patterns of crime   |  |   |   |
| 10 | Loss of rural focus – urban domination (?) of issues  |  |   |   |
| 11 | Squeeze on services that may deliver – housing. Opportunities to develop affordable housing not dependent on S106. RHEs to identify sites |  |   |  |

| <b>Community Group 2</b> |   |  |   |   |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|---|
|                          | Issues                                      | Ideas/response   |   |   |
|                          | Community empowerment                       | Deploy best practice   |   |   |
|                          | Transport for rural communities<br>Planning | Exploit Community Initiative Fund (CIF)<br>Every council to allocate 0.5% budget to community fund |  |  |
|                          | Funding flow                                | Community finds out what best practice is  |   |   |
|                          | Finding people                              | Listen to your community   |   |   |

| <b>Business Group 1</b> |   |  |   |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|--|
|                         | Issues  | Ideas/response   |   |  |
|                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of capital which businesses have to invest</li> <li>• Customers having less money in their pockets to spend</li> <li>• Lack of funding for SHORT courses</li> <li>• Lack of joined up business support</li> <li>• East of England is conceived by Government as being 'ok' and not warranting special attention/funding</li> <li>• Tendency to try and mainstream when rural differences exist – rural suffers</li> </ul> | Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The weak pound offers opportunities for tourism</li> <li>• A map of small local businesses for tourists could be produced (e.g. see Midland Meander Project)</li> <li>• Take advantage of 2012 – join together to produce promotional literature aimed at getting people into the region</li> </ul> |  |  |
|                         |   | Colour coding money to track it's movement   |   |  |
|                         |   | Labelling food – made in East of England – and never left there!   |   |  |
|                         |   | Exchange of best practice  |   |  |

|  |   |  |  |   |
|--|---|--|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to use local produce and businesses, but it doesn't always happen</li> <li>• Honest (food) labelling is needed – e.g. where a product is produced locally and sold locally but has travelled 250 miles in between this should be distinguished from a product with low food miles</li> </ul> | <p>Develop project like 'Beds Growers' and support and co-ordinate co-operatives</p>   |  |   |
|  |   | <p>Work with / lobby local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lobby District and Borough Councils re arrears chasing and re reducing payment periods for small businesses in time of recession</li> <li>• Make procurement easier for small businesses</li> </ul> |  |  |

| <b>Business Group 2</b>  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Issues</b>  | <b>Response /Idea</b>   |   |  |
| Restrictions/barriers to accessing grants and funding and the right help.  | Reducing restrictions –across the board reduction on restrictions of all regulations for business and access to grant funding made simpler  |    |  |
| Planning – restrictions prevent diversification of farms and rural businesses  | Simplify the planning process, make it a “yes” culture not a “no” culture. Improve communications between businesses/ farmers and planners  |    |  |
| Farming should be at the economic Core   | Change perception of how we look at the countryside today, it’s about farms not just environment  |   |  |
| Local Food Production should be on equal footing with environmental policy   | Improve tools to sell locally and reduce number of large supermarket planning approvals.<br><br>Establish community initiatives – inject pump priming funding into communities to do this |   |  |
| Access to Services - if they can’t get to services, how can we get the services to them. Lack of GPs in rural areas concern about move to large distant health centres | Multi use community buildings including shop, GP service etc.   |  |  |
| Parish Councils aren’t always aware of their own powers and how to use their precept   | Better use of Precepts and improving Parish Councils knowledge base of powers etc.  |  |  |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   | <p>Greater PC support for local Businesses</p> <p>Parish Plans and Village Design Statements/ CPL's identify community aspirations and needs; these need to feed into Local Development Frameworks.</p> <p>Funding for Community Led Plans needed</p> |  |  |
| Making hidden capacity/ funding in organisations more visible   |   |  |  |
| Lack of support for elderly in rural areas. Makes it difficult for the elderly to remain in their homes/ rural communities current alternative is to move to more urban areas | Move away from large health centres to community based social and health care – more care to allow elderly to remain in their homes/communities   |  |  |
| Umbrella Organisations - one stop shops/ point of contact for information   |   |  |  |
| Government needs to listen to local views more  | Lobby Government, MPS, Parish Town Councils local Authorities   |  |  |
| Lending is currently macro not micro – small businesses struggling to access liquid assets and secure interim loans with banks  | <p>Expanding the role of the Credit Unions with regulated interested rates.</p> <p>Local Branches with local managers to deal with local businesses.</p>  |  |  |



Appendix 2

**East of England Rural Forum**

**Annual Conference 2009**

**Wednesday 4 March 2009**

Lavenham Village Hall, Lavenham,

Church Street, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 9QT



East of England Rural Forum

**Rural Communities Helping the Region through the Economic Downturn**

**Agenda**

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 0945 -1000  | <b>Registration</b> , Refreshments available   |
| 1000 - 1010 | <b>Chairman's Welcome</b> , John Yates   |
| 1010 -1035  | <b>Small Business – the backbone of the Rural Economy</b><br>Ron King, Chair of Federation of Small Businesses, Area Policy Unit, East Anglia Region   |
| 1035 -1100  | <b>The credit crunch - a view from the CAB service in the East of England</b><br><br>Sue Wigley, Area Manager, CAB   |
| 1100 - 1115 | <b>Coffee</b>  |
| 1115 -1135  | <b>Credit Crunch, an Opportunity</b> - Peter Couchman, Acting CEO, Plunkett Foundation   |
| 1135 -1245  | Response from County Forums<br><br><b>Essex</b> - John Jowers, The Essex Way<br><br><b>Bedfordshire</b> – Sarah Hughes, Enterprise & Regeneration Manager, Bedfordshire County Council<br><br><b>Cambridgeshire</b> - Marrienne Baker, Head of |

Community Programmes, Cambridgeshire ACRE

**Norfolk** – John Dixon, CEO for Norfolk RCC

**Hertfordshire** – Kate Belinis, CEO, CDA for Herts

**Suffolk** – Cllr John Goodwin, Suffolk County Council  
Member

- 1245 -1300     **Q and A and summing up of morning session**
- 1300 -1400     **Lunch**
- 1400 - 1410    **Chairman’s Welcome Back**, John Yates
- 1410 - 1430    **Where is rural housing in the middle of a credit crunch?**  
  
Matthew Dodd, Policy and Information Manager, Homes &  
Communities Agency
- 1430 -1455     **Renewable Energy Solutions for Rural Areas**  
  
Carole Randall, Renewables Deployment Manager,  
Renewables East
- 1455 -1530     **Break out session: How can we help?**  
  
Martin Collison
- 1530 -1545     **Feedback**
- 1545 -1600     **Report Back and Chairs final summing up**  
  
**Tea and disperse**

## Appendix 3

### Speakers Biographies

#### Ron King

Ron King is East of England Policy Chairman for the Federation of Small Businesses, a position he has occupied for over six years. He sits on the FSB National Policy Committee and the EEDA Regional Strategy Committee.

Although theoretically retired, he is still involved in running his own small business employing six people in the village of Heacham, Norfolk. His career started with a chemical engineering degree, followed by jobs in chemical and food research and engineering in the UK and USA, before moving to Norfolk in 1971 as chief engineer of Dornay Foods. After a series of senior production and marketing jobs he was appointed Research Director in 1977, and held a series of directorships before leaving the company in 1984 to set up his own business, which he has run ever since.

He is married with five children and four grandchildren.

#### Sue Wigley

Sue Wigley is the Citizens Advice Area Director for Central England which covers the Government Office regions of the East of England and the East and West Midlands. Sue's team includes Business Management Consultants who support 122 bureaux across Central England and a Partnership Development Manager who is responsible for external partnership development work. Sue started as a volunteer in Wakefield CAB in the 80's and has held most roles in bureau including managing Leeds CAB for 4 years.

#### Carole Randall

Carole's interest in the green sector began when she started work for Writtle College in 1998, having completed an environmental degree the previous year. During her time at Writtle she worked on numerous projects concerned with the rural environment as well as completing a postgraduate course at the University of Essex. Carole moved into the renewables sector in 2003 when she became first a member of the local delivery team for the Community Renewables Initiative, and finally manager of the same project the following year.

In 2006, while remaining based at Writtle College, Carole began work with Renewables East as their Community Renewables Advisor, incorporating the expertise she had accrued into Renewables East's newest work stream, Mass Market Renewables. The primary role of the Community Renewables Advisor was to offer impartial, expert advice to community groups at all stages of a project, helping to identify where renewable energy technologies might be successfully deployed, which

technologies are most appropriate and helping locate funding streams to support such projects.

Carole joined the Renewables East team on a full time basis in June 2008 as Renewables Deployment Manager. Her current role sees her working on numerous aspect of the renewables agenda including skills and training, planning and the use of microgeneration technologies to address fuel poverty.

### **Candy Atherton**

Candy Atherton is the chair of the government's Rural Housing Advising Group and a Board member of the Homes and Communities Agency.

Previously she has been the MP for Falmouth, a journalist, a Board member of the Housing Corporation and mayor. She lives in a small village in Cornwall with her husband Brod, three chickens and a mad dog and has her own public affairs company Atherton Associates.

### **Councillor John Jowers**

Councillor John Jowers is the Cabinet Member for Localism and Planning which includes spatial and local planning, rural issues and the hugely successful Community Initiatives Fund. He became an Essex County Councillor in May 2005, representing Stanway and Pyefleet in Colchester.

Having been in politics for over twenty years, he was previously the Leader of Colchester Borough Council and before that he was the Leader of the Conservative Group.

Aside from his public life, John, a West Mersea fish merchant and fisherman, can trace his family history on the island back for over eight hundred years. John has been married for forty years and has one son and one daughter. In the little free time which he has, he enjoys sailing yachts and reading.

### **John Dixon**

John has been the Chief Executive Officer at the Norfolk Rural Community Council since 2000. Prior to this he taught in London and Suffolk for 16 years; ran a number of small businesses in rural Norfolk and experienced extended unemployment for 19 months in last recession (1994-96). He was a Community Development Manager at Age Concern Norfolk from 1996-1999.

John was born and brought up on an isolated farm in Northumberland. His interests include photography and collecting old cameras, local history, organic gardening, environmental issues, local community, etc.

### **Kate Belinis**

Kate Belinis is the Chief Executive of Hertfordshire Rural Community Council and also the Chair of Hertfordshire Rural Forum. Kate is passionate about supporting and developing communities through the work of her rural team and specialists in transport, training, village halls advice and community led planning. Kate also chairs the Herts Strategic Engagement Task Group which aligns itself to the work of the county wide Local Strategic Partnership. Her other interests are social enterprise training; infrastructure support to Black and Minority Ethnic communities and advocate for rural affairs as a partner in several local strategic partnerships!

Her regional activities are Board member of Rural Action East and Chair of MENTER (Minority Ethnic Network in The Eastern Region).

### **John Goodwin**

John was born in the village of Ramsey near Harwich, Essex, the family moved to Suffolk when John was just a toddler. The son of a cowman, John lived his entire childhood on farms within Suffolk and thus started a love affair with all things rural. Leaving school at 15 years of age a career following father's footsteps seemed the way ahead, however this was not to be and a career in the Road Haulage is what happened, firstly as a lorry driver and then as a company owner. The business was sold in the late 90's and a life of sloth beckoned, this was not to be however as the money from the business sale was spent on property and John and his wife became landlords, a career that now runs alongside that of being a Suffolk County Councillor.

Since becoming an elected member of Suffolk County Council the life of sloth seems a long way away, time is now consumed with council business, John's official title is Assistant Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste but he is also involved in many other aspects of County Council life. Flooding and the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service plus membership of the EERF and the Rural Forum all sit alongside numerous other County Council duties all of which keep John gainfully employed.

John is married to Angel and they have five children, three of whom live in Suffolk plus two daughters who live in Florida and Minnesota.

### **Sarah Hughes**

Sarah is currently Enterprise and Regeneration Manager at Bedfordshire County Council and has been active on regeneration policy and programmes in the Bedfordshire for 19 years. In April she takes up post as Employment and Skills Manager at the new Central Bedfordshire Council.

At present she is responsible for Community Regeneration policy and investment strategy, Enterprise strategy and investment European and external funding management Rural Affairs (sub and regional). Other economic development activity includes skills.

She is an experienced Manager of people providing direction and support, coaching team members in their roles to achieve positive outcomes. Considerable experience of working in partnership at all levels across many agendas to deliver improved outcomes for residents. Current priorities include preparing the Economic Participation Plan for Central Bedfordshire and building a new team to deliver enterprise, skills and regeneration.

### **Marianne Baker**

Marianne has been the Head of Community Programmes for Cambridgeshire ACRE since 2007 and is responsible for the development and implementation of the organisation's community services portfolio. From 2006, Marianne has been an active member of the Cambridgeshire Rural Forum and she is currently engaged in the development of a new Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy, which will prioritise and guide the county's future investment in rural delivery.

Marianne is working closely with the new Fens Adventurers Partnership, supporting its engagement with rural communities and identifying future investment opportunities under the programme's fourth priority theme "Enterprising Communities". This work will support rural community-led initiatives to improve their service provision in an economically sustainable manner. Ensuring the rural voice is always heard and responded to, this initiative raises the importance of the community led planning process, enabling local people to take responsive action to halt rural decline.

Marianne has a first class Bachelors degree from the University of Southampton. In her spare time, Marianne enjoys the challenge of 'project managing' her young daughter's progress in the world, travelling with her family and turning a seasonal glut of parsnips or cabbages into great new recipes, tried and tested on unsuspecting friends.

### **Martin Collison**

Martin chairs the Rural Forum's Learning and Skills sub group, and is a member of the region's Sustainable Farming and Food Industry Group and Migrant Worker Steering Group. Martin works as a rural and agricultural policy consultant for a range of clients across government, the community and business sectors. He was an academic for 16 years specialising in international trade and business policy, and now works with the University of Lincoln to develop new courses on food markets and policy as well as supporting a number of other universities with research projects on rural and sustainable development. He also has business experience as a business owner/director in the arable, horticulture, livestock, education, import and wholesaling sectors.