

Vibrant Rural Communities

A Rural Policy White Paper for the East of England

On the behalf of the East of England Rural Forum, I am pleased to send you a copy of our rural white paper for the East of England – ‘Vibrant Rural Communities’.

Our view is that rural communities, their people, businesses and natural environment, are an essential part of the economic recovery of the country and have a tremendous contribution to make to a greener, prosperous and sustainable future.

The paper describes the EERF’s vision for our rural areas over the next ten years and proposes actions necessary for its achievement. We intend to campaign for its objectives and work with partners to champion this vision.

In particular, there are three critical areas which have impacts across all rural areas:

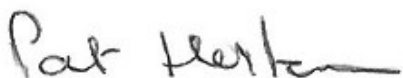
- **Digital inclusion** is critical to the future of rural areas. Access to high speed broadband is fundamental to growing the rural economy and enabling rural inhabitants to access services;
- **Rural economic growth** needs to occur at a faster rate than the regional economy to reverse the trend to ever greater levels of out commuting which have been seen in recent years. This will drive social, economic and environmental sustainability and provide a future for young people within their rural community;
- **Demographic change** requires active interventions to retain young families through improving their economic opportunities and by tackling the shortage of affordable rural housing whilst ensuring rural services meet the needs of older people.

The coalition government and the emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships have a clear role to play in supporting our aims and creating the right conditions for action by communities, public, private and third sectors.

In the autumn, after government policy and plans for the economy and organizational structure are announced, we intend to produce an explicit Action Plan in support of this white paper. This will describe in more detail the recommendations and identify those bodies and organisations we need to work with and the actions necessary to achieve our vision.

I look forward to your support for the ambitions of our paper and welcome any comments you may have on its proposals and ideas to increase the economic and social well being of our rural communities.

Yours sincerely,



Pat Holtom

Chairman East of England Rural Forum