



EERF

East of England Rural Forum

# **Scoping Document for the Development of a Regional Rural White Paper for the East of England**

**For the  
East of England Rural Forum**

**ITT Version 1.1**

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[www.eerf.org.uk](http://www.eerf.org.uk)

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## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The East of England Rural Forum believes that it is the appropriate time to develop a Rural White Paper for the Region. The Forum believes that the White Paper for the East will be a visionary document for the Region. It will be an important influencing document for policy makers at local, regional and national government level.

1.2 This Scoping Document sets out the purpose and priorities of the proposed document and identifies the process and its outcomes.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1 The East of England Rural Forum (EERF) is an independent body and its purpose is to provide a voice for rural stakeholders at a strategic level, capable of influencing the rural agenda in the East of England. In addition, it provides a channel of communication between rural stakeholders, the Regional Assembly, government and other organisations. It also has a role in providing input at national level, with Rural Affairs Forums in the other English regions and with the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC). It is not responsible for the delivery of individual services.

2.2 A key Forum responsibility is to act as the Region's rural voice. As part of this, the Forum has strong contacts with a wide range of constituencies and sub-regional partnerships. It also takes full advantage of regular contacts with Government Ministers and their Departments to proactively raise potential solutions to address issues of concern.

2.3 The Forum has produced a number of "Position Papers"<sup>1</sup> that have been written and used as evidence to promote key rural issues with strategic partners at a regional and national level. All the papers have been well received. Some, however, do need updating. Whilst their content covers a wide range of topics, there are also still some big gaps that need to be filled.

2.4 The last national Rural White Paper was published in 2000 with its subsequent refresh of the Rural Strategy published in 2004. These were both national documents that were generic to the whole of the country. They were both written at a time when the government needed to set out a vision of a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside. The White Paper was published at a time of rapid change for rural areas. The Rural Strategy, four years on, reflected that social, economic and environmental changes were affecting rural communities apace. They were both in the main "top down" documents.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.eerf.org.uk/position-papers.shtml>

2.5 In March 2009, the Forum held their Annual Conference, Rural Communities Helping the Region through the Economic Downturn.<sup>2</sup> The key 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.” Its proposed outcomes were to:

- 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.

2.6 In order to pursue these outcomes the Forum believes that it is now timely to present a rural picture of the specific issues facing the region as a consequence of the recession and changing political direction. It will build on from the work already carried out in developing the Position Papers.

2.7 The Regional Rural White Paper will develop solutions and present opportunities that will support a sustainable and dynamic future for those living and working in the rural areas.

### **3.0 Purpose**

3.1 The purpose of the White Paper will be to refocus priorities for rural communities in the East of England region against a changing backdrop of national, regional and local policy and organisational structure.

3.2 Through engagement between public, private and voluntary sector partners this document will be presented as an agreed vision and strategy to achieve it over the next five years for all partners to sign up to and then facilitate the actions that address the issues identified.

3.3 It will be an important influencing document. At a national level the CRC and ACRE are producing, through coalition working, a statement for a vision for Rural Communities. The East of England’s Rural White Paper will be able to feed directly into this work, emphasizing, as appropriate, that the region does not necessarily mirror the national more generic picture, but has its own very real issues.

3.4 In the Region EERA have the responsibility to carry out an early focused review of its spatial strategy to be completed by 2011. The review requires the Plan to extend its coverage to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.eerf.org.uk/annual-conference-2009.shtml>

2031. The proposals from this Rural White Paper would be fed into the EERA process to help shape regional policy for the next two decades.

## 4.0 Stakeholders

4.1 The key stakeholders to this process will be:

- The Forum members (as representatives from their own constituencies)
- EEDA
- EERA
- CRC
- GO-East
- The Environment Agency
- Natural England
- The Forestry Commission

4.2 All will play an important part in the development of the White Paper and also through its implementation and delivery of any subsequent action plan through funding and policy measures. The Forum will be the owners of the final document.

## 5.0 Aims and Objectives

5.1 The overarching **aim** of this Paper will be:

“To produce a visionary document that sets out a 5 year plan of how to develop opportunities for rural communities in the East of England in order to grow the rural areas against the current state of the region’s economy.”

Table 1: Proposed Aim of Regional Rural White Paper

5.2 The **key objectives** for the development of the document will be:

- To develop priorities to enable the Forum to have a strong rural voice in the region
- To influence key stakeholders at national, regional and local level
- To strategically influence the emerging agendas and manifestos across the three main political parties
- To refocus priorities for rural communities in the region
- To engage through this process and afterwards with Forum “sister” groups, such as the Environment Forum, the Sustainable Food and Farming Group and Sustainability East

## **6.0 Process**

6.1 This paper will be drafted as a research based piece of work using evidence to identify collective priorities from the key stakeholders of the region. The majority of evidence used will be taken from statistical research. It is however understood that some evidence cannot be measured and therefore will only be opinion substantiated.

6.2 It is expected that in order to gather evidence and develop a regional ownership there will need to be a number of consultations with key groups representing all rural constituents of the regions rural communities as well as the key stakeholders.

6.3 The following are the key stages:

1. Develop an evidence base to inform the drafting of the paper
2. Prepare a draft paper setting out:
  - Benefits of the process and aspirations
  - Gap analysis
  - Priorities, goals and objectives
  - Delivery plan
3. Consult on draft document
4. Finalise the draft of the Regional White Paper
5. Submit draft to EERF
6. Publication and launch Spring 2010

## **7.0 Deliverables**

7.1 The five key stages to delivering this plan are:

1. Assessment
  - Identify where we are today in the region with regard to existing policy in the economic, social and environmental fields and what is being or has been achieved as a result of these frameworks including whether there has been true integration across all three. The paper will then need to identify where the region wants to be in 5 years time.
2. Benefits of the process
  - The paper will need to identify the benefits and outcomes to people in the region and how it can meet community needs.
  - The paper will have to demonstrate how it relates and fits to the current policy agenda
  - Identify the outputs that are required to achieve the new five year plan against key themes such as but not necessarily restricted to:

- |                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| ➤ Access         | ➤ Water                 |
| ➤ Health         | ➤ Food                  |
| ➤ Transport      | ➤ Growth                |
| ➤ Climate Change | ➤ Commercial Enterprise |
| ➤ Housing        | ➤ Infrastructure        |
| ➤ Skills         | ➤ Community Engagement  |
| ➤ Land use       |                         |

3. Identify the key areas of development to achieve the vision for rural areas as set out in point 1.
4. Identify what individuals, businesses, third sector and communities can do for themselves.
5. Identify the areas in which the public sector needs to intervene to support actions by those groups listed in point 4.

## **8.0 Outcomes**

8.1 The key benefit of drafting and delivering this paper will be that the region has a strategic rural plan in place for the next five years. It will support and grow rural communities to enable them to become vibrant places to live and work.

8.2 A Regional Rural White Paper would achieve the following:

- It will define a prioritised and phased programme that will support the growth of rural communities through developing opportunities and identifying solutions to key issues.
- Identify a set of priorities that public and private investment could align with in terms of developing policy, local strategy and investment on the ground.
- Enhance the way that rural constituents work in the region through mutual agreement and ownership of a single delivery plan.
- Inform at a national level the region's rural priorities.

8.3 In order to deliver this, the plan must be:

- Visionary but have full clarity
- Be clear about the priorities for change and how to deliver the key objectives.
- Have full agreement and commitment to support its objectives from all stakeholders on its position.

## 9.0 Risks and Resources

9.1 The following table sets out highlighted risks associated with the delivery of this project.

Risks	Contingency	Probability
Delays around the approval of the Plan by the Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EERF Steering Group to be given early sight of Scoping Document at least 2 weeks prior to Forum meeting on 16/9 meeting.</li> <li>Forum to be informed at 16/9 meeting</li> </ul>	Low
Delay to the appointment of consultants via the tender process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural Action East (RAE) to prepare documentation for ITT process and identify possible consultants by mid September for ITT to be sent out late Sept</li> <li>Responses back to RAE by 2<sup>nd</sup> week of October</li> <li>Consultants begin work <b>1<sup>st</sup> Nov at latest</b></li> </ul>	Medium
Insufficient time to be built into the consultation process that will be critical in gauging regional response and direction to the plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EERF December meeting will focus solely on responding to Consultants.</li> <li>Consultants will have to set out in ITT their proposed work plan with timings.</li> </ul>	Medium
Insufficient resources available from “Partner Organisations” to match fund EERF to fund this work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce scope of project.</li> <li>Lengthen timescale in order to cover 2 financial years.</li> </ul>	Medium

**Table 2: Risk Assessment**

9.2 In order to deliver the drafting of the project, the Regional Rural White Paper “Task and Finish” group will need to continue to meet throughout the period of the drafting to review the progress of the appointed consultants on behalf of the Forum.

9.3 The Group consists of:

- Pat Holtom – Chair
- Suzanne Harris
- Mick Carr
- Cindy Winn
- David Wood – Secretariat

9.4 The group will also need to include the appointed consultant. The group will report to the Rural Forum quarterly.

9.5 There will be additional resource required to “manage” the delivery of the Rural White Paper from 2010 to 2015. This resource will have to be funded via the Forum and/or cash or in kind contributions from key stakeholders.

9.6 The document will require a full and thorough consultation exercise alongside carrying out a lot of research in order to ensure that it is a robust document that all partners and stakeholders can sign up to. This will be a large piece of work.