

The East of England Rural Forum
Strategic Plan
2009 – 2010

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1.0 Purpose

The East of England Rural Forum (EERF) is an independent body and its purpose of the EERF 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 is to provide a channel of communication between rural stakeholders, the Regional Assembly, government and other organisations. It also has a role in providing input to the 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.

2.0 Specific Forum Responsibilities:

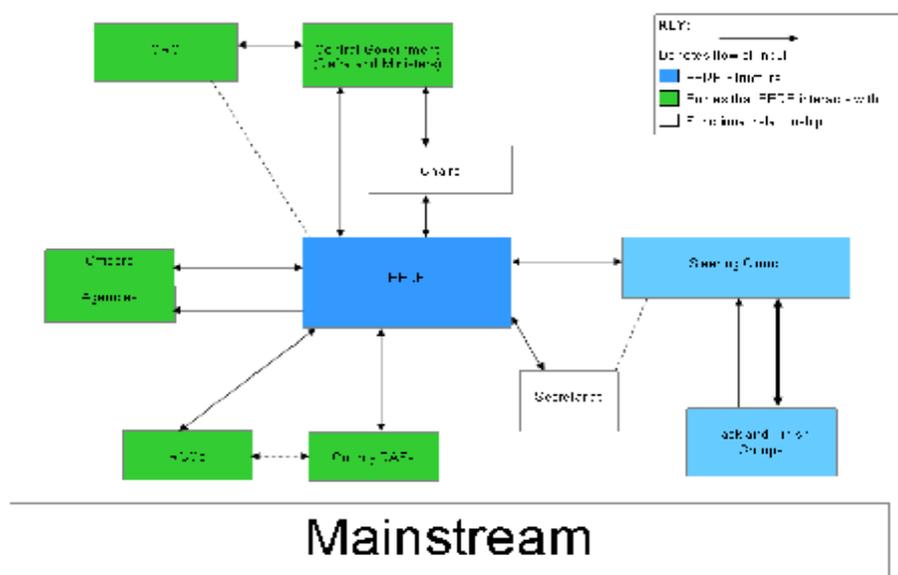
- Rural voice - the EERF will act as the rural voice of the region, particularly through developing stronger contacts with a wide range of constituencies and sub-regional partnerships. In addition, the members' consultations with their constituencies will enable the EERF to take full advantage of regular contacts with Government Ministers to proactively raise potential solutions to address issues of concern. The EERF will alert the CRC to emerging rural issues.
- Rural proofing – the EERF will respond to key national and regional policies and strategies to make sure that they take account of the rural stakeholder perspective. The EERF will share its regional knowledge/intelligence/evidence or Consultation responses to support and assist the CRC in its national role.
- Priorities – the EERF will contribute to the development and review of regional delivery priorities as set out in the Regional Rural Delivery Framework.
- Monitoring, scrutinising and reviewing - the EERF will monitor and challenge, on a continual basis, how the priorities outlined in the Regional Rural Delivery Framework are delivered by key partners.
- Regional Links – although the EERF is an independent body, it will provide a link between rural stakeholders and key delivery bodies in the region. The EERF will disseminate CRC research/reports to regional stakeholders.
- Sub-regional links – County Rural Forums (RAFs) the Rural Community Councils, Rural Action East and the Commission for Rural Communities will contribute to the rural agenda through representation on the Regional Forum. The EERF will feed back to stakeholders.

3.0 Structure and Membership

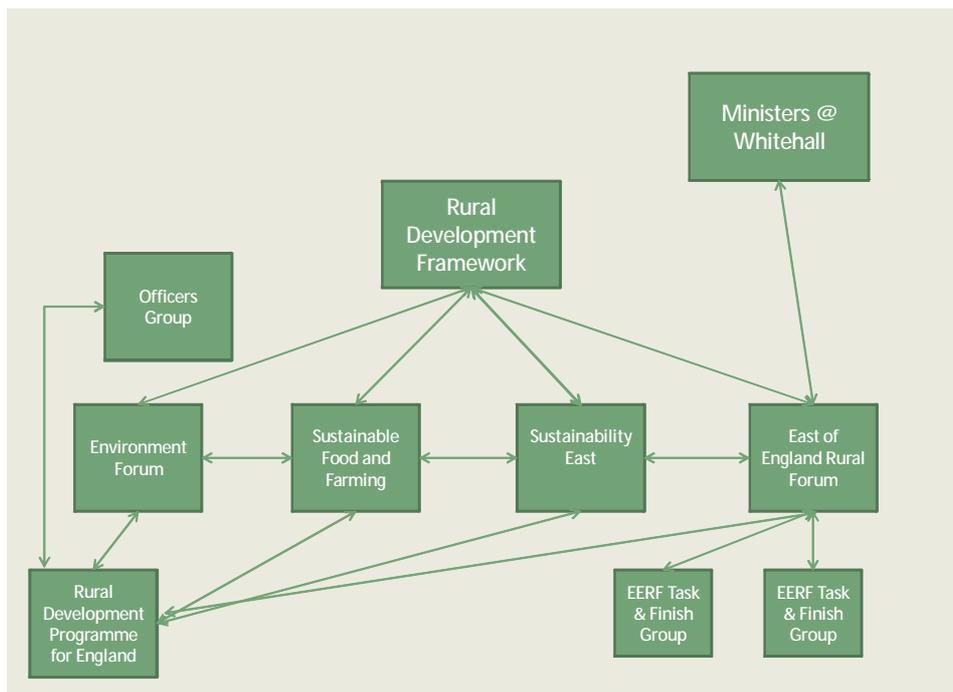
The membership of the EERF is broad based across rural stakeholders in the region. This is to achieve a balance between comprehensive representation and effective decision making. The Membership reflects regional thematic and geographic balances across the three pillars of sustainable development (environment, economy and community). The EERF includes a member of the CRC Management Board.

4.0 Governance

The following diagram sets out the role and relationship that EERF has within the region with other organisations and bodies and to others outside. It demonstrates that EERF is a pivotal body that has the ability and responsibility to identify grass root issues that are affecting the rural communities and to influence accordingly. It will provide a platform for these issues to be discussed and progressed through the necessary channels in order for change to happen.



The following diagram sets out the relationship between EERF and other Regional groups. It demonstrates that EERF is the only group that has an official "line" to Whitehall and the Minister.



5.0 Key Forum Outputs

The Forum has established some key task and finish groups whose remit has been to raise awareness and work through specific issues relative to the region. From these groups a number of papers have been produced and used as evidence to promote these issues with key strategic partners at a regional and national level.

The key position papers to date that have been produced are:

- Planning issues that impact the rural economy
- Housing
- Sustainable food and farming
- Water resources
- Inward investment
- Learning and skills
- Growth
- Wheels to work
- Regional Rural Delivery Framework

6.0 Links to Forum Stakeholders

This network is vital to enable EERF maintain its independence and ability to provide grass root representation to key government departments. The relationship has to be a strong, communicative two way process. Without County Forums and local representation from members and stakeholders the future viability of the Forum is in jeopardy. Recently the relationship has weakened with little of the two way process being evident. As part of the outputs for 2009/10 this relationship must be strengthened and secured.

7.0 Working with Key Partners

The key strategic partners in the region that have been supportive to the Forum including EEDA, Natural England, The Forestry Commission, EERA, The Rural Community Councils, and CPRE. Go-East has provided secretariat and other functional support.

In order to ensure that the Forum remains viable for the long term it will be imperative that the breadth of this support is developed further through in kind or cash contributions. The Forum can play a significant role in relation to them developing and advising further on strategy and policy. The Position Papers are evidence to date that the forum can influence the regional and national agenda.

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and EERF have a range of shared interests, not least in wanting to see diverse, thriving and sustainable rural communities where no one is unfairly disadvantaged by where they live. EERF and the CRC are developing a close working relationship that adds value to and gains benefit from one another's activities whilst recognising and respecting their independent roles and particular areas of focus. During 2009/10 this relationship will continue to strengthen through an improved two way engagement, advocacy and communications of emerging rural issues.

Further to this the Chair of the Forum meets on a quarterly basis with the Defra's Rural Affairs Minister alongside fellow regional RAF chairs. This meeting is an invaluable gateway for communicating directly with the Minister.

The Forum has empowered a Steering Group to form. They set the agenda based on issues that have been identified as important for the East of England

8.0 Key work focus for 2009/10

The Forum will continue to meet quarterly. The steering group will meet bi-monthly to provide feedback of issues identified at a local level and pursue issues that have been raised at the regional meetings.

Forum Meetings

The Forum will meet to discuss the following rural based themes:

- 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.
- Health: Access to services and sport, the aging population in the region and their needs.
- Further work on the impact of the downturn of the economy on rural communities, the theme for the March 2009 Annual Conference.
- 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.

Task and Finish Groups

Further to this future Task and Finish groups will be established to specifically look at possibly the following:

- The value placed on a healthy natural environment and a healthy rural economy
- RRDF: Action Statement for 2009/10
- Social Inclusion – identifying through having the adequate tools and methodologies to measure accurately the pockets of rural deprivation. It may aim to tackle the issue of accessing an adequate rural evidence base rather than tackling the perceived generalisations of this issue.

9.0 Communications

Methods of communication for Forum members over and above the Forum meetings are via:

- Emails
- Minutes of meetings
- Newsletters
- Website

It is proposed to develop the website during 2009/10 linking it to the County Forum pages and other relevant partner organization pages. The information on the website must be timely and up to date. The position papers will be on the site and easily accessible with an associated trail of where they have been sent and when and for what purpose.

The membership of the task and finish groups will be published in order to allow interested parties to contact them.

10.0 Budget

The key outgoings of the budget are:

- Running of sub/task and finish groups
- Member's expenses
- Conference
- Forum meetings
- Website maintenance
- County RAF's
- Co-ordinator

The budget for 2008/09 was £25,000. This cost excludes the running of the secretariat which for 2008/09 has been hosted by the Government Office. It does cover part of the cost of contracting a coordinator to support the Forum. The remaining part of the coordinator costs have been provided by the Government Office.