

14th February 2016

**Thaxted, Tilty, Great and Little Easton Walk – 2nd April 2016**

We are planning another in our series of enjoyable spring walks in aid of the Essex Rural Fund, and would be very pleased if you were able to join us. Experience has shown that these walks are usually accompanied by spring sunshine and good company: both enjoyed in attractive countryside with a few interesting features. This year’s will be no exception.

You may opt for a morning walk followed by lunch, or lunch followed by afternoon walk, or lunch with walk before and after, or just lunch (details below). Whichever you prefer, it would be immensely helpful if you would return the enclosed form to tell us whether you plan to join us for lunch so that we can organise the catering accordingly. If none of these are possible, but you do not wish to feel left out, a donation is probably the only answer!

Can we please make one further plea: talk to your friends about the walk, particularly your younger friends, and invite them to join us. We are determined to avoid the march of progress which will otherwise see the walks shrinking in ambition, and ending up as wheelchair processions!

**About the Essex Rural Fund**

Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) is a charity that has been working with rural communities in Essex since 1929 and aims to create a better future for Essex villages. The Rural Fund was established by RCCE in 2008 to provide funding support specifically to community groups and charities working in rural areas of the county. Villages, whether through necessity or goodwill, have always done a lot for themselves. This tradition continues with amenities such as village halls and play schemes as well as numerous clubs and societies run almost entirely by volunteers.

With the decreasing availability of public money and the generally short term nature of funding streams, our aim is to build a sizeable fund that will be available for Essex’s rural communities in perpetuity. We know that even a small amount can go a long way - and can be the difference between projects, services and facilities happening or not. There may be willing volunteers to run a mother and toddler group at the local village hall, but without some money to buy equipment they won’t get off the ground; and a small grant to a new community shop to buy initial stock may be the difference between opening or not.

Projects that have already benefited from the Essex Rural Fund include a new community transport service for stroke survivors in rural Tendring, the extension of a CAB service to bring help to people on the isolated Dengie Peninsula and essential repairs to Sampfords Village Hall, which serves two small rural communities near Saffron Walden.

**Progress so far**

Through an active programme of events a small group of trustees, staff and friends have assisted in growing the Fund to almost £250,000 as at 31 December 2015. We began to make grants in 2012 and have already awarded more than £33,000 in grants to good causes in Essex villages. These sums are beginning to grow, but they are still small in the context of the needs of Essex’s rural communities. With your help we aim to raise the value of the Fund substantially in the coming years, and to make it better known, enabling the Fund to make a difference in a greater number of our villages.

**How to give**

We are happy to receive donations in any form, ranging from gifts of shares to annual standing orders, but we want to make giving as easy and painless as possible. The enclosed form gives details of how to give, and you will see that you may support us online through “Just Giving”. Where applicable we will claim Giftaid.

Please encourage your friends to join you in what we hope will be an easy and painless way of raising money.

**About the Walk**

The plan this year is that walkers should leave their cars at the Gardens of Easton Lodge – CM6 2BB or grid reference TL 594239 – from where the party will be transported in the Layer Marney Routemaster bus to Thaxted, departing promptly at 9.45 am. The walk will start from just outside the magnificent church in Thaxted, and head south towards the Chelmer valley. We walk through attractive country towards Tilty, with an opportunity to enjoy the ruins of the Cistercian Abbey, and on to the edge of the village of Great Easton, before descending to Easton Farm – TL 604248, where we will lunch by kind permission of Bob Trembath. His barn will provide shelter in case of bad weather, but if the weather should be fine we will be able to enjoy his lovely garden with some fine specimen trees. The morning’s walk will be about five miles in length and we plan to break for lunch at about 1pm.

After lunch you may either walk back to your car, or walk via Little Easton parish church and Little Easton Manor to the Gardens of Easton Lodge, which the Trustees have kindly agreed to open for us. There we will be given a guided tour, replete both with garden information and with colourful tales of Daisy, Countess of Warwick, mistress of the future King Edward VII, who laid out the gardens and the immense park which surrounded Easton Lodge.

After the tour, survivors may be refreshed with a cup of tea at the home of the High Sheriff of Essex, Vincent Thompson and his wife Diana, at adjacent Easton Glebe.

We very much hope you will join us on this venture, and look forward to your support.

David Boyle JP DL Nicholas Charrington DL

Vice President Chairman

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