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..... and 248 village hall  
management committees.

## Essex Rural Partnership

RCCE speaks out for rural communities representing their needs to all levels of government. We also provide leadership for the wider rural sector in Essex through our management of the Essex Rural Partnership (ERP).

ERP brings together a broad range of stakeholders to foster collaboration on the major issues facing rural Essex. In addition to RCCE, key partners include Essex County Council, District Councils, Essex Police, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Essex Association of Local Councils, National Farmers Union, Diocese of Chelmsford and Essex Wildlife Trust.

The focus for ERP's work is provided by the Essex Rural Strategy, launched in 2016. This sets out a shared vision and 10 priority themes for the next four years, as well as encouraging the creation of task and finish groups to address specific problems. The first of these has brought together relevant partners to tackle the problem of large-scale, industrial fly tipping.

## Case Study: Essex Police Rural Crime Strategy

Rural crime featured prominently in ERP's deliberations in 2017/18, with RCCE and other partners engaging directly in the development of the new Essex Police Rural Crime Strategy. This is the first strategy of its kind to be produced by Essex Police with direct input from external partners.

A special meeting of ERP was used to identify priorities for the strategy and the launch event held at Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome in November was jointly organised by ERP, Essex Police, and the Office of the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner. This was staged in conjunction with a Rural Crime Awareness Day and was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, the Chief Constable and more than 30 partner organisations. In tandem with the launch of the new strategy, Essex Police emphasised its commitment to rural policing by setting up a new Gypsy, Traveller and Rural Engagement Team.



## LEADER

The Essex Rivers LEADER programme has a total of £1.48 million available to stimulate rural business growth, diversification and job creation across a large part of rural Essex. RCCE manages the programme in conjunction with a Local Action Group (LAG) of private, public and voluntary sector representatives. The funding which comes from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development must be allocated by March 2019, in line with the UK's departure from the European Union.

An upsurge of interest this year resulted in the award of grants worth a total of £463,567. This means that more than £700,000 has now been allocated since the start of the programme in 2015. An important feature of LEADER is that it can support any business based in a rural area, not just those from the agricultural sector. This is reflected in the projects supported, which include food producers, vineyards, heritage and tourism projects, as well as farm businesses.

## Case Study: Essex Waterways

Essex Waterways manages and maintains the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation which runs through a delightful part of the Essex countryside connecting Chelmsford with the tidal River Blackwater at Heybridge Basin.



The company which is also a registered charity and is based at Little Baddow, identified an opportunity to provide a passenger boat service as a way of attracting more visitors. With the aid of a LEADER grant of £33,000, the 'Victoria' was purchased. The boat, specially built for this waterway, now offers cruises for groups, parties, weddings and meetings. It provides an important new income stream for Essex Waterways, as well as creating 2 new full time jobs.

## Community Agents Essex

The Community Agents Essex service that RCCE runs in partnership with its three voluntary sector partners, British Red Cross, Age UK Essex and Neighbourhood Watch Essex, and with funding from Essex County Council, is now widely regarded as offering an innovative and highly effective approach to the challenge of providing social care in the 21st century.

Working in the community, the team of agents helps vulnerable elderly people retain their independence, and by enabling them to continue living safe, happy and well in their own home, it is making a significant contribution to tackling the scourge of social isolation. The service has now helped nearly 15,000 clients since its launch in July 2014.

Community Agents Essex is working alongside other early intervention initiatives, such as social prescribers and health coaches, as an integral part of new Care Navigation Partnerships established in West Essex, Basildon & Brentwood and Mid Essex. It is also working with Colchester Hospital University Foundation Trust to operate a 'Home from Hospital' navigation service

## Case Study: Beating Social Isolation in Braintree

Community Agent Chivonne Claydon is a familiar face at a social group in Braintree, but not as a member.

Over the past few years Chivonne has introduced many clients to the Moving On club, often taking them along to their first meeting as moral support.

Recently, she took a 69 year-old widow to the club and was delighted to see another lady she had introduced eighteen months ago.

"It was lovely to chat to her and hear how her life has changed since joining the club. This group does so many things – lunches, theatre trips, get-togethers on birthdays, holidays abroad and loads more. They are very proactive in keeping in touch with members between meetings and encouraging them to stay involved."

Chivonne has introduced eight people to the club over the years.

She said: "Reducing the loneliness of clients is an important part of our work as Community Agents. Often they don't present with this, but it soon becomes apparent that social isolation is a factor in their wellbeing, particularly nowadays when families live far apart."



This picture is not related to the case study.

## The Year in Brief

- Terling won the 2017 **Essex Village of the Year Competition** in spite of strong competition from the other three finalists, Earls Colne, Wickham St Pauls and Berden. The competition focuses on the work of communities and the efforts of local people, especially volunteers, to strengthen and sustain village life.

- With large parts of rural Essex unable to access mains gas, RCCE continues to provide a **Community Oil Buying Scheme** open to consumers, businesses and community buildings. The scheme is run in partnership with Community Action Suffolk, our counterparts across the county boundary, and AF Affinity, a subsidiary of Anglia Farmers. In a typical month, members saved an average of £27.57 inclusive of VAT on an average order of 890 litres of oil.

- RCCE continues to promote and raise money for the **Essex Rural Fund**, the fund it has established to provide small grants to support community projects and charities in rural Essex. This year's highlight was providing funding to support the Lamarsh Lion Community Pub. This is an ambitious, volunteer-led project to purchase, refurbish and re-open the only pub in this small village on the Essex-Suffolk border, which closed in 2016 having served the community for almost 700 years. Essex Community Foundation manages the Rural Fund on RCCE's behalf.



Community Agents  
handled over 6,000 enquiries  
in 2017/18

# Thanks

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Waltham Abbey TC

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## Annual Review 2017-2018





# Thanks

Rural Community Council of Essex would like to say a special "thank you" to all organisations that have funded or sponsored its work over the past year, and to those that have pledged their support for the year ahead.

Defra  
Essex County Council  
Big Lottery Building Better Opportunities Fund  
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We would also like to record our thanks to our Auditors, Whittle and Partners LLP.

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The Old Exchange  
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# Supporting People and Places in Rural Essex – RCCE in 2017/18

## From the Chairman

Rural communities are frequently described as tranquil, stable, even unchanging: in reality change is all around. Here in Essex, as elsewhere, our villages are wrestling with challenges and pressures, presented by the loss of cherished local services; the lack of affordable housing; the spectre of loneliness and social isolation; the threat of excessive development.



For all their traditional resilience, rural communities need help and support to cope with this change - which is where RCCE comes in. This latest review shows us actively engaging with communities across the county, helping them find solutions to the issues that matter most to them. The impact of our work is evident in the provision of new homes for local people, in the modernisation of many village halls and in the number of vulnerable people whose lives have been improved by the Essex Rural Skills Project and especially the Community Agents service.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Trustees and our highly professional and dedicated staff team, all of whom are at the heart of our continued success. We have seen changes in both staff and Trustees this year, notably Martyn Drain, who served on the Board for 13 years and latterly gave excellent leadership to our Financial Control Committee. Also Suzanne Harris, who contributed so much in a variety of roles during her 17 years on the staff.

Finally, thanks to our members, sponsors and funders – especially our major funder, Essex County Council. Thank you for enabling us to meet the challenge of change.

**Nicholas Charrington DL, Chairman**

## Community Engagement

Villages and rural towns in Essex aiming to create Neighbourhood Plans look to RCCE as the 'go to' body for advice and guidance. These plans, which have a statutory role under the 2011 Localism Act, enable local people to pro-actively influence development in their community, giving them an opportunity to secure the housing and amenities they need for a sustainable future.

RCCE is supporting 33 individual plans across the county, two of which are currently at examination stage. A new contract was secured this year with Epping Forest District Council, to facilitate the development of plans in the district, mirroring similar agreements in place with Braintree, Maldon and Uttlesford.

Intensive support for individual plans is augmented by a programme of countywide training and network events, which this year attracting a total of 120 participants. These include the popular 'coffee mornings' which encourage groups to share experiences and provide mutual support in a more informal atmosphere.

RCCE uses its skills and experience of community engagement to deliver a number of other projects and contracts. These include facilitating Lottery-funded 'Big Local' partnerships to drive economic and social change and providing 'community enabling services' to parishes impacted by plans for three new garden communities in North Essex, helping them to understand and engage constructively in the process.



RCCE supported 33 Neighbourhood Plans in 2017/18

## Rural Housing Enabler

Increasing the supply of affordable housing is critical to improving the life chances of young people and families living in rural Essex today. Without such housing, many people will be unable to afford to live in the community where they have roots, family and often employment as well. This has knock-on implications for local businesses, services and community cohesion.

In rural Essex the average home costs 11 times the average salary

RCCE's Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) service, which it operates in partnership with four registered housing providers and six local authorities, works to provide small scale schemes based on the evidence of housing needs surveys it facilitates with the local parish council. It is also exploring innovative new ways of providing community-led housing.



## Case Study: Wickham Bishops

Wickham Bishops, near Witham, is an attractive village with plenty of community groups and activities. It is also an expensive place to live, which led the parish council to explore ways of providing more affordable homes for local people.

RCCE was involved from the outset, conducting a Housing Needs Survey for the parish council in order to identify the specific requirements of the community. The evidence gathered from the survey was used to shape a particularly ambitious scheme branded 'Village Homes - Something for Everyone'. Built by English Rural Housing Association (one of RCCE's housing provider partners) with backing from Maldon District Council, the scheme provides 12 attractive new affordable homes including both flats and bungalows available for rent and affordable home ownership. In turn these are part of a larger development which also includes 15 market homes, marketed at local households.

The affordable homes have been made available at below market rent and planning restrictions ensure that local people with a connection to Wickham Bishops have priority to live in them.

This innovative scheme, built without any public subsidy, was completed in May 2017 and named Mackmurdo Place, after the writer, architect and founder of RCCE, Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo. It was officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal, on a memorable day in April 2018.



## Essex Rural Skills Project and Abberton Rural Training

Although much of rural Essex exudes an air of prosperity, issues of deprivation, low skills and disengagement from the labour market are evident in the more coastal and rural parts of the county.

RCCE responded to this by setting up the Essex Rural Skills Project following a successful bid to the Big Lottery's Building Better Opportunities (BBO) fund, which is supported by the European Social Fund and South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Launched in September 2017, the project targets people aged 45 and over, who are currently economically inactive. There is a particular focus on Colchester, Braintree, Maldon, Tendring and Chelmsford districts.

The Essex Rural Skills Project is being delivered alongside other courses run by Abberton Rural Training (ART) which RCCE has managed since it was set up in 2013. ART, which uses the natural environment for the benefit of its students, is currently running a skills programme aimed particularly at younger students and in an exciting new initiative, is now working with Colchester Garrison to deliver a Rolling Recovery Programme course that helps soldiers leaving the army for medical reasons, gain skills to obtain employment or further education. Both of these courses are being funded by Essex County Council Adult Community Learning.

ART courses and the Essex Rural Skills Project are delivered from ART's base at Wormingford Community Education Centre, and from additional sites at Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome, near Maldon, and Colchester Garrison.

## Village Halls & Community Buildings

Village halls remain at the heart of rural community life. In many villages, they provide the only readily accessible venue for an enormous range of activities, clubs, meetings and events. The durability of halls – some 85% of rural communities in Essex have one – makes them more important than ever at a time when the rural population is ageing, evidence of loneliness and social isolation is headline news and the availability of other traditional amenities such as pubs, shops and post offices is in decline.

The vast majority of halls are registered charities run by volunteer trustees. For these volunteers, RCCE's Village Halls and Community Buildings Advice Service provides a real lifeline, helping them cope with every facet of hall management from charity law to major redevelopment projects.

In January 2018, RCCE joined with other members of the ACRE Network to stage the first ever National Village Halls Week; a week-long celebration of halls and the volunteers who maintain them.

## Case Study: Peldon and Wigboroughs

Peldon, Great and Little Wigborough are three small rural communities in the Borough of Colchester, sandwiched between Abberton Reservoir and Mersea Island.

Saturday 2nd September 2017 was a momentous day for the three villages as it marked the official opening of their brand new community hall and with it the culmination of more than 10 years' hard work by trustees and residents to plan, fundraise and build the new hall.



RCCE's Village Halls and Community Buildings Adviser, Sue Sheppard, was involved throughout the process, providing the trustees with advice and guidance on funding applications and on appropriate governance structures. An entirely new hall was a necessity as Great Wigborough village hall was derelict and the hall at Peldon, although only built in the 1960s, had reached the end of its working life.

This made for a formidable fund raising target in excess of £550,000, but a grant of £100,000 from the Abberton Reservoir Community Fund got things moving and contributions followed from Essex County Council's Community Initiatives Fund, Colchester Borough Council, Essex Community Foundation and the ACRE Village Hall Loan Fund. Some funds from the sale of the old Great Wigborough hall helped, but over £100,000 was secured through donations and a multitude of local fundraising events.

The result is a spacious hall built to a very original design that provides an exciting new focal point for the three villages. It has already encouraged the creation of 12 new community groups and the design, lighting and other features are perfect for the amateur dramatic performances and concerts that are a big feature of community life.

248 individual halls affiliated to RCCE in 2017/18

## Growing Communities

RCCE has continued to develop its Growing Communities project which educates children about growing and eating locally grown food.



The centre piece of the project is a competition which asks children to design a kitchen-garden plot and create a recipe for a healthy packed lunch using the produce.

A total of 79 schools participated in this year's competition, including 5 special schools that have a category of their own. This represents a significant increase from the initial competition in 2017.

The winning entries came from Notley Green Primary School and Cedar Hall School, who have received support from RCCE in planting their entries.

740 individual entries were received for this year's Growing Communities competition



48 participants have taken part in the first year of the Essex Rural Skills Project

# Who's Who

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