



ANNUAL REVIEW 2022/23

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR YEAR





Setting the Scene

Essex remains a significantly rural county with 72% of its surface area designated as rural. Many Essex villages exude an air of wellbeing even in difficult times but behind this façade there are real challenges common to all rural communities.

- 1** Rural communities have a higher proportion of older residents increasing demand for services such as health and social care.
- 2** Limited public transport can leave vulnerable groups isolated and without ready access to jobs, training, essential services and social opportunities.
- 3** Rural residents not online will be particularly vulnerable to the closure of local facilities such as post offices, banks and libraries.
- 4** Increasing development pressures with 200,000 new homes required across the county by 2040 can mask the desperate shortage of affordable housing in rural areas.
- 5** Volunteers are a bedrock of rural life; managing assets such as village halls, helping vulnerable neighbours and sustaining services such as shops and pubs which can no longer survive commercially, but they need support and encouragement particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- 6** The current cost-of-living crisis has a rural dimension with rural residents being disproportionately affected by the rising cost of food, transport, heating and housing.
- 7** Rural areas must adapt to climate change but face specific challenges on account of their greater car dependency and older housing stock.

These challenges provide the context within which Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) works. Set up in 1929, we are an independent charity working to secure a thriving and sustainable future for rural communities throughout Essex. Here is a snapshot of what we've achieved in 2022/23.

Affordable Rural Housing

With residents in parts of rural Essex needing to pay 12 times average earnings for the most affordable home, far too many young people are being shut out of the local housing market with consequences for the sustainability of the villages they call home.

RCCE's Rural Housing Enabler service is working with parish councils, specialist rural housing providers and local authorities to counter this by facilitating small-scale schemes on rural exception sites based on the evidence of local housing needs surveys.



PROGRESS IN 2022/23



8 Housing Needs Surveys completed



Scheme opened at High Easter (Uttlesford district)



12 further schemes in pipeline for development

Community Led Housing

Alongside its work on affordable rural housing, RCCE is a partner in Eastern Community Homes. This is a regional hub established by the six Rural Community Councils in the East of England, that supports initiatives such as community land trusts, co-operatives and cohousing which can enable local people to secure fairly priced housing for their community.

PROGRESS IN 2022/23



6 community led housing projects supported



Contract secured with Chelmsford City Council



Virtual conference on community led housing organised with Eastern Community Homes

Neighbourhood Plans



PROGRESS IN 2022/23

43


43 individual plans supported

11 ✓

11 plans successfully completed



In person training and network events resumed

RCCE has established itself as a focal point for advice and support for Neighbourhood Plans which enable local communities to pro-actively influence development and give them an opportunity to secure the housing and amenities they need for a sustainable future.

Village Halls and Community Buildings

The past year has seen a gradual resumption of normal activities at the county's village halls and community buildings after the lockdowns and restrictions necessitated by the pandemic. The volunteer trustees of more than 250 member halls have looked to RCCE for support and guidance on a multitude of concerns and many were able to make their halls more Covid-secure with help from the Covid Safe Community Buildings Fund, managed by RCCE on behalf of Essex County Council. The fund closed in this year, but RCCE is now helping halls access the new Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund launched in December 2022.

Following on from the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis has left its mark on village halls notably with the spike in energy prices prompting an increase in requests for advice on energy efficiency.

PROGRESS IN 2022/23

£1m

£1 million in grants distributed through the Covid Safe Community Buildings Fund

18


18 halls supported with successful applications at stage 1 of the Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund



Webinar staged for member halls on energy efficiency and net zero in conjunction with the Essex Climate Action Commission

Community Agents Essex

The Community Agents Essex service focuses on helping vulnerable people and their informal carers; enabling them to continue living safely and independently in their own homes.

RCCE employs a team of 32 agents, working across all 12 districts under the jurisdiction of Essex County Council, who since April 2022 have formed an important component of the new Essex Wellbeing Service. The agents provide a confidential service to those in need, assisting with issues ranging from Blue Badge applications, financial concerns, home maintenance issues to social opportunities.

PROGRESS IN 2022/23



More than 5,800 enquiries handled



More than 1,000 Blue Badge applications processed



700 clients supported in accessing social opportunities and connections

Social Isolation and Loneliness

RCCE has a team of 14 community resilience coaches who work at district level as part of the 'United in Kind' campaign initiated by Essex County Council. They work to address the problem of loneliness and social isolation already recognised as a significant political issue and exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

The support given by the RCCE team over the past year has been diverse and embraced all ages. It has included the 'Hug in a Shrug' community crochet and knitting

project, help with digital connectivity and initiatives to welcome refugees from Ukraine. The 'Find Your Active' project through which RCCE employs local Community Connectors to encourage people to be more active but to do so in a way that best suits them will be brought under the umbrella of 'United in Kind' in 2023/24.

PROGRESS IN 2022/23



More than 10,000 acts of kindness instigated



More than 3,000 volunteers successfully involved in community activities



More than 10,000 items made through the 'Hug in a Shrug' project



Growing Communities

RCCE's 'Growing Communities' project focuses on children and the importance of educating them on the benefits of growing, eating locally sourced food and caring for nature and the environment.

The annual competition for schools, which is the focal point of the project, was entitled 'Bee Good' in 2022 and invited children to design a plot that would encourage bees to thrive.



PROGRESS IN 2022/23



Prizes awarded to schools from Stock and Woodham Ferrers and to Wethersfield Before and After School Club



Competition supported by the Augustine Courtauld Trust and Kings Seeds

Essex Rural Partnership



RCCE facilitates the running of the Essex Rural Partnership (ERP), one of 17 local and regional rural networks recognised by Defra, which brings together partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors to consider the strategic challenges facing rural Essex today.

Alongside RCCE, key members of ERP include Essex County Council, District Councils, Essex Association of Local Councils, National Farmers Union, Essex Wildlife Trust, Farming Community Network, Essex Police, Office of the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner, Diocese of Chelmsford, Visit Essex and Essex Young Farmers.

Rural crime has been a priority for ERP and this year it joined with Essex Police and the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner as a sponsoring partner of the newly refreshed Rural Crime Strategy for Essex.

PROGRESS IN 2022/23



5 partnership meetings facilitated



Refreshed Rural Crime Strategy launched



Draft of refreshed Essex Rural Strategy produced

Engagement and Influencing

RCCE uses its skills and experience to engage proactively with an extensive range of partners and provides a voice for rural communities to all levels of government.

PROGRESS IN 2022/23



Support for Essex County Council's 'Levelling Up Rural Braintree' initiative



Engagement with Essex districts on plans for the new Rural England Prosperity Fund

Big Local



Support for Lottery-funded 'Big Local' partnerships to address long-term social and economic challenges

Thank You Funders and Members

RCCE would like to say a special thank you to all organisations that have funded its work over the past year, in particular:

Essex County Council, Defra, Provide CIC, Braintree District Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Epping Forest District Council, Maldon District Council, Tendring District Council, Uttlesford District Council, Big Local Trust, English Rural Housing Association, Hastoe Housing Association, Chelmer Housing Partnership and Augustine Courtauld Trust.

We would also like to acknowledge the generous support of our members who this year comprised, 253 village halls and community buildings, 155 parish and town councils, and 51 individual and corporate members.



Who's Who

Patron: Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst, HM Lord Lieutenant of Essex

President: Nicholas Charrington DL

Vice Presidents

David Boyle JP DL
The Revd. Canon John Brown DL
George Courtauld OBE DL
Cllr. John Jowers
Lord Petre KCVO
Professor Jules Pretty OBE
Richard Woolley

Board of Trustees

Dr James Bettley JP DL FSA (Chair)
Simon Lyster DL (Vice-Chair)
Ralph Bray
Roger Brice
Simon Brice DL
Cllr. Graham Butland
Dr Caroline Dollery
Susie Dutton
Revd. Canon Janet Nicholls
Sarah Pinkerton
Paul Roberts
Martin Stuchfield MBE JP DL

Staff Team

Nick Shuttleworth (Executive Director)
Sarah Sapsford (Community Engagement & Services Manager)
Gemma Humphries (Finance Manager)
Laura Atkinson (Rural Housing Enabler & Community Led

Housing Adviser)
Sally Austin (Community Agents Specialist Adviser)
Danielle Frost (Village Halls & Community Buildings Adviser)
Michelle Gardiner (Community Engagement Officer)
Neil Harper (Rural Housing & Community Engagement Officer)
Lydia Howat (Essex Wellbeing Service Locality Co-ordinator – Mid Essex)
Nicky Percival (Community Agents Co-ordinator)
Elizabeth Rose (Partnerships & Promotions Officer)
Laura Stacey (Essex Wellbeing Service Locality Lead – Mid Essex)
Jan Stobart (Community Engagement Officer)
Sara Ward (Administrator)

Community Agents

Dawn Bostock, Marion Buffett, Sandra Burkin, Nicki Carnaby, Margaret Carter, Chivonne Claydon, Jodie Clay-Moran, Kelly Coombs, Jackie Driscoll, Nicky Duhig, Nicky Hoy, Ben Lacey, Jennifer Mason, Jan McKay, Sara Moutard, Vicky Newbrook, Lola Oni, John Peart, Donna Reilly, Charlotte Riley, Tracey Rolph, Sandy Sadler, Kusum Sharma, Kim Vanderhoven-Smith, Yvonne Weaver, Steven Wilkins, Christina Wood, Helen Woodhall.

United in Kind Coaches

Amy Melton (Service Co-ordinator), Rebecca Morton (Essex Wellbeing Service Volunteer Co-ordinator), Sarah Ayling, Christine Chester, Kelly Coombs, Tracey Crook, Karis Galliano, H Goodwin, Jayne Laken, Ali Massey, Corrina O'Donnell, Amy Robelou, Nick Robinson, Catherine Venables, Anna Wilson.

Find Your Active Co-ordinators

Carolyn Beal, Tracey Bliss, Tracey Crook, H Goodwin, Mirka Marri, Amy Melton, Carol Wakeman.

Financial Summary

Year ended 31 March 2023

| All figures in £ | Unrestricted | Restricted | Total 2023 | Total 2022 |
|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total Income | 388,695 | 1,242,585 | 1,631,280 | 2,517,470 |
| Total Expenditure | 350,086 | 1,449,732 | 1,799,818 | 2,118,623 |
| Operating Surplus | 38,609 | (207,147) | (168,538) | 398,847 |
| Transfers between Funds | - | - | - | - |
| Net Movement in Funds | 38,609 | (207,147) | (168,538) | 398,847 |
| Funds Brought Forward | 867,067 | 687,939 | 1,555,006 | 1,156,159 |
| Funds Carried Forward | 905,676 | 480,792 | 1,386,468 | 1,555,006 |



ANNUAL REVIEW 2022/23

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR YEAR

Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)
Threshelfords Business Park
Inworth Road
Feering
Essex CO5 9SE

T: 01376 574330
E: enquiries@essexrcc.org.uk
www.essexrcc.org.uk



Registered Charity No. 1097009
Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered No. 4609624