

Barleylands hosts  
Channel 5's Harvest  
on the Farm

United in Kind  
'Hug in a Shrug'  
project wins Award

Essex LNRs: a new  
strategic plan for  
nature recovery

# OYSTER

THE VOICE OF RURAL ESSEX

Issue 50  
Autumn / Winter  
2023



**RCCE**  
RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF ESSEX



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Cover photo: Barleylands Farm team with Channel 5's 'Harvest on the Farm' presenters (see page 6). Top row L – R: Chris Philpot, Tim Bilton, Jules Hudson, Rob Nicholson, Dave Nicholson, Charlotte Powell. Middle L – R: Diane Mitchell, Megan Cooper, Maggie Earl, Laura Peacock. Front L – R: Amy Winch and Helen Skelton

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## From the Director

RCCE does not work in isolation. We are one of England's 37 county-based Rural Community Councils, all of whom are members of Action with Communities in Rural England or ACRE as it is commonly known. ACRE may not enjoy a high public profile in comparison with some other rural and countryside bodies, but it is highly respected within Government and has enjoyed some notable successes of late. Ahead of the Government's Autumn Statement, it lobbied successfully for the downgrading of VAT on energy saving materials for village halls and it has recently been entrusted with the management of the new national Rural Housing Enabler programme which has the potential to facilitate a much-needed increase in affordable housing in rural areas.

In a new survey of its members, ACRE identified village halls, health and wellbeing, community engagement and affordable housing as the services most frequently delivered by Rural Community Councils. RCCE has certainly been active on all these issues in 2023. We've helped local village halls access funding from the new Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund and supported Neighbourhood Plans and Housing Needs Surveys across the county, with 12 housing schemes now in the delivery pipeline.

Through our Community Agents and United in Kind services, we've also played a

prominent role in what has been a successful first year for the Essex Wellbeing Service, as featured at our AGM in October.

As well as being part of the ACRE Network, closer to home, RCCE continues to manage the Essex Rural Partnership. This brings us together with a host of other organisations all with a shared concern for the future of our county's rural areas including Essex County Council, Essex Association of Local Councils, National Farmers Union, Essex Wildlife Trust, Visit Essex, the Diocese of Chelmsford, Farming Community Network, Essex Police and the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner. In this edition of Oyster, we are pleased to include news from some of our partners as well as from RCCE itself.

The year ahead looks set to be another challenging one for all concerned with our rural communities. Cost of living pressures will continue and there will almost certainly be a General Election and with it the need to ensure the rural voice is heard in an increasingly urban-centric society.

However, before we get to any of that I must thank all our members, funders and partners for their wonderful support this year and extend my best wishes to everyone for a Happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

**Nick Shuttleworth**  
Executive Director



Ellen Van Gemmert, Essex Wellbeing Service

# AGM highlights RCCE's work in another challenging year

The beautifully restored Essex Barn at Layer Marney Tower provided an imposing setting for RCCE's 2023 Annual General Meeting which took place on 4th October.

The Chairman, James Bettley thanked all members, funders, and partners for their support over the year, in particular acknowledging the extensive assistance provided by Essex County Council. In introducing the Annual Review for 2022/23, Executive Director Nick Shuttleworth set out the context in which RCCE worked, highlighting a series of challenges common to rural communities throughout Essex.

These included the ageing population, a shortage of affordable housing, poor access to services for those without transport or not online, a growing dependency on volunteers to sustain local services and the cost-of-living crisis which

was having a disproportionate impact on rural households.

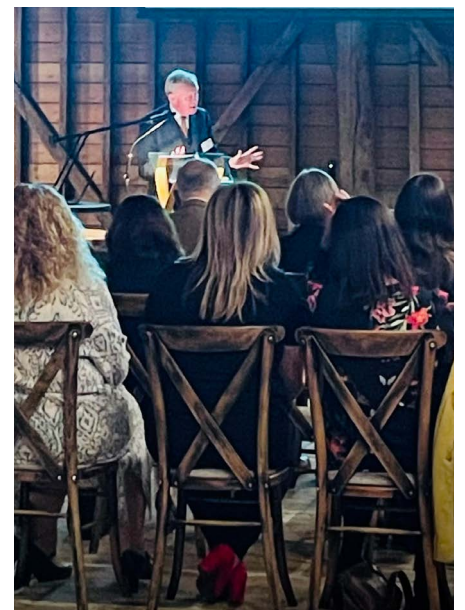
He illustrated how RCCE was helping communities to respond to these challenges by facilitating affordable housing schemes, supporting neighbourhood plans, helping village halls secure funding for improvements and making a significant contribution to the Essex Wellbeing Service through its Community Agents and United in Kind services.

This latter point was amplified in a presentation on the first year of the Essex Wellbeing Service by Ellen Van Gemmert of Provide CIC, the lead partner for the service,

**RCCE helps communities to respond to challenges by facilitating affordable housing schemes, supporting neighbourhood plans, helping village halls secure funding for improvements and making a significant contribution to the Essex Wellbeing Service.**

and RCCE's Community Engagement and Services Manager, Sarah Sapsford. Sarah focussed on the work of the United in Kind coaches who operate in each district. Over the past year through a range of initiatives they had facilitated more than 10,000 acts of kindness and helped more than 3,000 volunteers get involved in community activities, all helping to tackle the scourge of loneliness and social isolation prevalent across all ages. More information on United in Kind was available at a display stand manned by some of the coaches.

RCCE would like to record its thanks to its President, Nicholas Charrington and his team at Layer Marney Tower for kindly hosting the AGM and for providing the post-meeting refreshments so greatly appreciated by all present.



James Bettley, RCCE Chair

# Village Halls Conference 2023

By Danielle Frost RCCE Village Halls and Community Buildings Adviser



This year's Village Halls Conference was held at East Hanningfield Hall and was the first in person conference since before Covid. It was also my first as Village Halls and Community Buildings Adviser. The agenda was full with a varied programme of speakers and topics, including Cllr Peter Schwier Climate Czar and Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling at Essex County Council (ECC), Emily Berry, Utility Aid, Jan Stobart, RCCE Community Engagement Officer, Dr Muhammad Ahsan (PhD), Community Safety Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue, Anthony Henry, Bridge Interiors, Caroline Brown and team, Early Years Child Care, ECC and Kelly Coombs, United in Kind Coach for Chelmsford.

Hanna's Field, the charity which runs the hall made us all feel very welcome. Jenny Mouser and Mike Plumridge, respectively Chair and Treasurer of the hall, gave us a presentation on its history and on recent developments. Along with other trustees they were on hand all day to answer questions and pitch in with advice from their own experiences. The hall has a preschool, a shop and post office and was

**The feedback from the day was very complimentary and it was great to see everyone stay right until the end.**

recently successful in being awarded a grant from the Platinum Jubilee Fund. They have a strong and vibrant committee and provide a much-valued service in their community.

Some of the interesting points which came from the discussions during the day were the need for more recycling at village halls both with outside bins and inside facilities to encourage hirers to recycle too. There is also a lot of confusion around solar panels; the amount you need, whether you should or shouldn't have batteries, the payback period, funding, and VAT. It was suggested that if village halls came together to jointly purchase them this would give them greater buying power. There was also a great deal of benefit to organising an energy audit,

to give village hall committees action plans to improvements. RCCE offers an in-person service and Utility Aid provides a remote service. This advice is particularly pertinent, considering the new grant about to be announced by the government which requires an energy audit.

The preschool presentation attracted a lot of interest, many village halls accommodate preschools and are considered both a valued service and source of income. The governance around them though is confusing and compliance with Ofsted requirements can cause issues for the village hall and preschool relationship. The team from ECC identified and mitigated many of the concerns from the day, mostly around independent toileting and access to halls. They also offered to discuss and visit any village halls with preschools, to help increase their knowledge and understanding.

The feedback from the day was very complimentary and it was great to see everyone stay right until the end. It was noted that attendees would have welcomed more time to network and chat with each other. Something for us to consider for next year.

Thank you to Nick Shuttleworth, RCCE Executive Director and the staff from RCCE for helping out on the day.



Peter Schwier

## HARVEST ON THE FARM



**“We were thrilled with the opportunity to host and looked forward to showing the dedication, skill and effort of our staff that went into the season across all of our farms.”**

**Photo above: The Philpot family owners of Barleylands Farm. L-R: Joanna Philpot, Peter Philpot, Sophie Philpot, Thomas Philpot, Emma Philpot, Annette Philpot and Chris Philpot.**

# Barleylands hosts Channel 5’s Harvest on the Farm

Barleylands Farm Park, based in Billericay, Essex played host to the latest iteration of Channel 5’s popular TV series, “on the Farm”.

Harvest on the Farm, as this series was titled, aired at the end of September focusing, unsurprisingly, on the harvest season and all the work involved to ensure a successful harvest of crops. We were thrilled with the opportunity to host and looked forward to showing the dedication, skill and effort of our staff that went into the season across all of our farms.

The show shared the hard work farmers undertake during the harvest in order to keep the country fed, at a time when a spell of weather too dry or too wet can make

the difference between a bountiful harvest or a complete washout. A spokesman for Channel 5 hailed the show “an epic celebration of great British food and farming” ahead of the launch evening. Hosted by Strictly Come Dancing star, Helen Skelton and Escape to the Country’s Jules Hudson, the show aired live every night at 8pm for 4 nights and featured an array of guests. The Barleylands staff and family owners also appeared on the show each evening, along with some of their animals. The staff enjoyed watching live from the set and loved being part of the team.

# HARVEST ON THE FARM

With an array of well-known faces, the show had Tim Bilton cooking delicious food each evening and Yorkshire's Cannon Hall Farm brothers Rob and Dave Nicholson taking part in challenges. The hilarious Rob vs Dave challenge saw Dave scoop the winning race on the final evening, driving one of Barleylands' Farmular One cars.

As well as the brothers, the presenting duo were joined by radio and TV host George Lamb, ITV's Lorraine and Good Morning Britain resident doctor Amir Khan, JLS star JB Gill, and Reuben Owen from Channel 5 series Our Yorkshire Farm.

The programme also highlighted the role Barleylands plays in educating the local community to understand where it is their food comes from. St Peters Primary School West Hanningfield, along with Rob and Dave took part in a Field to Fork Day, following the journey of their food from planting to plate. The children had great fun learning about wheat production and in the polytunnel picking ingredients which would go well on a pizza. Most importantly, the ingredients were put to good use and everyone had the chance to make and tuck into delicious, self-made pizzas!

As well as making food, the students had the opportunity to use our interactive display in the farm museum, having fun guessing how long it would have taken to harvest the wheat in the early 1800's compared to 21st century farming using a combine harvester!

From meeting the animals on the farm, grinding wheat into flour, visiting the educational polytunnel to pick fresh tomatoes, peppers and herbs, making healthy pizzas from scratch and enjoying a bumpy tractor ride around the farm, a fun educational visit was had by both children and teachers.

It was a wonderful week and Chris Philpot thanked all of the staff for their tremendous efforts over not just the week itself but also the months leading up to the filming. A lot of work went into preparing the farm and the grounds for the show.

**All four episodes of the programme can be found on Channel 5's catch up 'My5'.**



**Rob and Dave on the Farmular One cars**



**Barleylands Education Team, Rob and Dave Nicholson with St Peters Primary School, West Hanningfield**



**Jenny and Tim – Donkeys at Barleylands having their 5 minutes of fame**



**L-R: Jordan Bailey, Megan Cooper, Tracy Fory, JB Gill, Charlotte Powell, Emma Sayer and Nicola Sibley.**

WINNER!



## BBC Essex Make a Difference Award United in Kind Coach is nominated and wins!

RCCE's United in Kind Coach Corrina O'Donnell was nominated for the 'Together' award which is presented to an individual or group of people who inspire diverse communities to come together. They do this by creating real change and breaking down barriers, bringing people from different walks of life together for a common cause.

Here Corrina describes her triumphant evening,

"I was nominated for the 'Together' category and made it to the final four and invited to the awards night. That in itself was amazing, it was full of wonderful people that put lots of time and effort into their local communities for many different reasons. To then win the award was overwhelming, my judge told me she loved the ethos of United in Kind and how combatting loneliness was so important"

"To win an award for doing something that I truly love really meant the world to me, I love bringing people together and watching friendships form and seeing the difference it makes to their lives, and to mine. I am lucky to work and live in a community with so many kind people. I had the most amazing night accompanied by my friends from the walking group United in Strides, a group which I set up that has made a difference to so many peoples lives"

**"To win an award for doing something that I truly love really meant the world to me."**



Let's connect  
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with kindness

To find out more about United in Kind work please click here.



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## Improving broadband connections in rural areas

Essex County Council has recently completed a milestone in its broadband improvement programme, with the completion of its final contract with the operator Openreach.

Since 2012, Essex County Council's broadband improvement programme has boosted connections to more than 160,000 addresses in Essex. During the pandemic, the county council was responsible for 1 in 5 addresses in Essex being able to access superfast speeds.

Now, thanks to the Phase 4b contract with Openreach, a further 3,559 homes and businesses in some of the hardest-to-reach rural areas in Essex can now access speeds of up to 1,000Mbps or 1Gbps.

These high-speed connections can make a big difference in people's lives – from enabling residents to access the online job market, use public services, and stay connected with friends and family hassle-free. And, with more than 20% of Essex businesses based in rural areas, bringing connections to these communities is also key to boosting the Essex economy.

Essex County Council funded the Phase 4b contract, alongside the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural

Affairs (DEFRA), the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), the Getting Building Fund (GBF), and Openreach.

Openreach recently invited special guests to its Great Dunmow exchange to learn about broadband technologies and see the process of joining fibre optic cables, known as 'fibre splicing'.

Councillor Lee Scott, Cabinet Member for Planning a Growing Economy, said: "The completion of the final Openreach contract is a huge milestone for Essex.

Digital connectivity is key to achieving our Levelling Up goals in Essex. Homes and businesses in the hardest-to-reach locations in Essex will be able to unlock the benefits of this improved connectivity, fostering economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for our residents."

The Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP for Saffron Walden added: "Thousands of residents and businesses across the constituency now have superfast broadband connections following this rollout, and it is great to see and hear first-hand how it is benefiting residents, local businesses, and the wider community."

Essex County Council has set its sights on making sure every resident and business address has access to a superfast broadband connection by 2025. Read more about the Digital Strategy for Essex at [www.superfastessex.org/digital-strategy](http://www.superfastessex.org/digital-strategy)

**These high-speed connections can make a big difference in people's lives – from enabling residents to access the online job market, use public services, and stay connected with friends and family hassle-free.**

### **Affordable broadband for low-income households**

Essex County Council's Digital Essex team is continuing to raise awareness of social broadband tariffs for households receiving benefits.

Broadband providers are offering discounted deals to help low-income households save up to £202 a year on their internet bills, in response to the cost-of-living crisis. These lower prices are locked in, meaning eligible households won't face mid-contract price rises and unexpected charges.

Digital Essex has been visiting communities across Essex to

raise awareness of these deals, speaking to residents who may be eligible and would otherwise face barriers to staying connected.

Councillor Louise McKinlay, Essex County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Levelling Up, Communities and Business Engagement, said: "Essex County Council wants to help more people get online. We'll be publicising the low-cost broadband deals to encourage people who could benefit from them, to sign up."

Households in receipt of benefits including Universal Credit, Pension Credit, Employment and



Support Allowance, Jobseeker's Allowance, or Income Support may be eligible for a social broadband tariff.

Residents can choose from many broadband providers like BT, NOW, Sky, Virgin Media O2, Vodafone, TalkTalk, and VOXI, with deals starting at £12 per month.

**Find out more at [www.essex.gov.uk/broadband](http://www.essex.gov.uk/broadband)**

### **Free mobile data from Essex Libraries**

If you're 18+ years old and struggling to afford an internet connection either at home or when you're out and about, you could be eligible for free mobile data to help you get online.

**Contact your local library or visit [www.superfastessex.org/mobile-data](http://www.superfastessex.org/mobile-data) to find out more.**



# ESSEX HORSE RIDER SCHEME



## Horse riders wanted to help us to protect our heritage and our rural communities

Essex Police is looking for horse riders who are keen to protect the county's rural communities and its heritage and help to keep them safe.



Essex also contains many historical and scheduled monuments and it's important they are protected against damage and criminal activity. If you want to be an extra pair of eyes and ears in the countryside, you can join the Essex Horse Rider Volunteer Scheme.

Riders have a unique vantage point and regularly use bridleways, footpaths and narrow country lanes that are not easily accessible by vehicles. So, they are well-placed to spot when something doesn't seem right or if something has changed. The scheme has been running successfully

in Uttlesford for the past year and now we're expanding it across our county. We're keen to hear information about any crimes or anti-social behaviour in our rural communities. It helps us to build a picture of criminal activity so we can best target our resources and find solutions.

Each new volunteer will receive a visit from a rural engagement officer who will explain what to look out for and how to report information to us. They will also be signed up to our Heritage Watch and Farm & Rural Watch schemes and receive weekly reports about relevant crimes in their area. The force will also be hosting regular online sessions, visiting stables and organising tackle-stamping sessions.

One of the scheme's newer members is Jenny Doyle. She escorts her 10-year-old son Ally on his rides in rural parts of the Colchester district.

Jenny says: "I like the idea of the scheme. It helps landowners, Essex Police and the local community and it helps horse riders as well. It enables us to look after the community we ride around.

"It's good practice for my son Ally, who's 10, to get used to paying attention to his surroundings and it's good practice for young people to learn to report something to the police if it's not right. Any communication young people have with the police is a positive thing.

"We're very lucky we have permission from a lot of the local landowners to use their tracks and we use public bridleways as well. We'd really like to look after them. I think it's a really good, community-building kind of scheme. It's a really good link between the public, particularly equestrians, and the police. And I think anything we can do to help and be helped by the police is a good thing. The more eyes which are looking around us."

Ally has ridden since he was four and enjoys both competing and hacking. He says: "I want to help because I don't like the fact that people do nasty things such as fly-tipping and stealing things. I want to help prevent that."

Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Nolan is the national police lead for Heritage Crime. She says the scheme will help to protect the countryside.

"We are proud to work with communities



**“I like the idea of the scheme. It helps landowners, Essex Police and the local community and it helps horse riders as well. It enables us to look after the community we ride around.”**

across Essex to keep people safe so, when we launched the trial of our Horse Rider Volunteer Scheme last autumn, I was excited to see how this opportunity developed,” says ACC Nolan.

“I’m so pleased that we now have volunteers across the county, well-placed to identify and suspicious behaviour in places that other watch schemes don’t get to see. Our horse rider volunteers look out for and report suspicious activity in rural areas to help us fight rural and heritage crime.”

### **About the Essex Horse Rider Volunteer Scheme**

Horse riders interested in taking part in the scheme must hold public liability insurance for the horse you ride and the animal must be well cared for. Volunteers will be provided with information as to what to look out for and how best to report any criminal activity.

To find out more, visit the **Essex Horse Rider Volunteer Scheme webpage**, where you can log an expression of interest.

**If you have information about any crime or anti-social behaviour, please report it online at: [www.essex.police.uk/ro](http://www.essex.police.uk/ro)**

## Unauthorised encampments in Essex reduced by three-quarters in five years

Essex Police rural engagement officers manage unauthorised encampments all year round but particularly in the spring and summer months. Since the force’s Rural Engagement Team was formed five years ago, there has been a continuous reduction in unauthorised encampments across Essex. There were 75% fewer in the 12 months to 31 August 2023 than there were during the same period in 2017/18.

The Rural Engagement Team manages all unauthorised encampments within the county. Officers manage the balance between the rights of individuals to lead a nomadic lifestyle and the rights of others to enjoy their local community spaces.

Inspector Terry Jacobs says: “Our officers visit every encampment reported to us, speak with the people there and set out expectations around conduct and legislation in line with the rights of all communities.

“If legislation is breached, we will follow national guidance and, where appropriate, we will require groups to leave the land, explaining the grounds why they are being moved. We’ve found that many groups acting anti-socially have stopped visiting Essex and conduct has improved.”

The mere presence of an unauthorised encampment does not provide police officers with powers to request people to leave the land. Unauthorised

encampments are a civil act of trespass and, as such, the landowner has powers to get the encampment to move on.

However, when they are reported to Essex Police, its rural engagement officers will speak to the trespassers, the landowner and relevant local authorities, often the council. Together, they will assess the site and ensure the most appropriate response according to the circumstances.

But certain criteria are required to be met and, where encampments are anti-social and cause disruption to local communities, rural engagement officers will take action and use legislation to require trespassers to vacate the area.

Inspector Jacobs says: “The message is clear, anti-social and disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated in Essex. Because our Rural Engagement Team is dedicated to the management of unauthorised encampments, it enables officers to provide a consistent, balanced approach, which ensures that our policing powers are used appropriately and proportionately.”

In the year to 31 August 2023, the force’s Rural Engagement Team managed 66 unauthorised encampments of which 13 (20%) were required to vacate the land.

In the previous 12 months, the team managed 76 encampments, with 20 (26%) resulting in eviction.



# Growing Communities Bee Good Competition 2023 – Results

RCCE's Growing Communities (GC) encourages young people to eat healthily, understand and learn about food provenance whilst capturing their imaginations. It helps assist with creating links between generations, enabling shared knowledge and promotes working with communities.

Whether a school is just starting out or looking to develop an established garden, the Bee Good Competition can help demonstrate the value of gardening, enriching the curriculum, teaching life skills and contributing to children's mental and physical health. The Bee Good Competition is all about the British Bee and how we can help by supporting these mini beasts that are so crucial to us. GC asked our busy bee helpers to create a bee haven for our buzzy little friends to feed, live and prosper not forgetting their pollinator friends!

The competition was open to all primary schools in Essex.



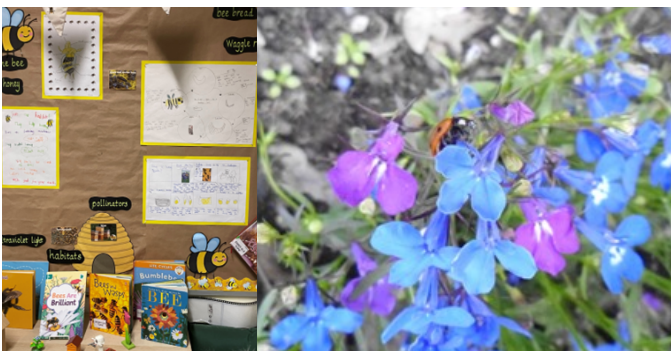
## Winner

### Coopersale and Theydon Primary School

Congratulations! to the Eco Warriors Club! The amount of work the children put into creating their Bee Good plot 'Bee-throw Airport' was incredible and what a fabulous name! The plot itself looked amazing which here at GC we are sure the bees loved and it also provided a wonderful haven for all. The outstanding work and commitment shown by the children was inspirational, not only have they studied about Bees but they have provided food and somewhere to live, a full package sanctuary that can be used for years to come – well done!

In her response to winning, Primary School teacher Sarah Huke said:

**“We are really proud of our children they have continued their excellent work this term by setting up a composting project to reduce our school waste from their fruit snacks at break time”.**



## Runner up

### Danbury Park Community School

Congratulations! It says it in the name... 'Busy Bees Happy Place' the design of the plot was well thought out for the age group (Years 1 & 2) and one could see the final result would look amazing once in full bloom. Another example of outstanding work and commitment shown by the children – well done!



Thank you to all the schools that entered the Bee Good Competition this year, it is great to know that our Bees and their friends have been supported by amazing Bee Good Plots created by the county's schools. The Competition will be back in 2024 further details will be posted in the New Year on the RCCE website.



# Dignity at Mealtimes Shirts

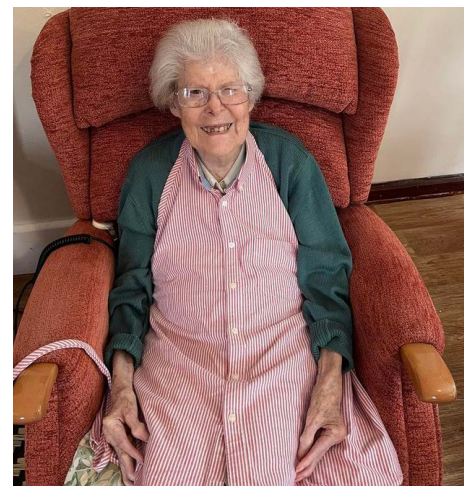
United in Kind attended an Alzheimer's Society Warm Hub earlier this year. Whilst there, the difficulties experienced in getting loved ones to wear a bib at mealtimes became apparent. Understandably a stressful situation for both the carer and the person.

With the help of the Alzheimer's Society, the Mealtimes Shirt idea was created with United in Kind at the helm. They set about requesting shirt donations, originally men's shirts but it quickly became apparent that women's shirts were required also. United in

Kind appealed to the Hug in a Shrug Group for sewers that would be able to help and make a couple of proto-type shirts bearing in mind there was no original pattern to follow. From there the Kindness Project has grown into 'Dignity at Mealtimes Shirts' The project is live in Chelmsford, Maldon & Rochford.

United in Kind Coaches are in regular contact with dementia support groups, day centres & care homes and all are really pleased with the Mealtimes Shirt donations. Broomfield Hospital has a regular donation of Mealtimes Shirts for the elderly wards and stroke wards.

This kindness project is offering a dignified alternative to traditional feeding bibs during mealtimes, nothing goes to waste as a wonderfully kind crafter uses the backs of the shirts and quilts them together to make blankets for the Cats Protection League, nothing is going to waste this really is upcycling at its best.



‘HUG IN A SHRUG’

# United in Kind ‘Hug in a Shrug’ project wins Essex County Council Social Value Award



**As part of Essex Wellbeing Service, RCCE delivers United in Kind, a project concerned with tackling social isolation and loneliness at a community level.**

One of its projects is ‘Hug in a Shrug’, a community initiative started by an act of kindness by an active knitter who contacted our United in Kind Coach for Castle Point Anna Wilson. Anna was so impressed by the idea that she asked the volunteer if United in Kind could develop this idea and from that one blanket donated the project has grown and grown. Once lockdown passed volunteers could start meeting in person and numbers has kept growing with the project, whether on social media, individually, in person or as offshoots of the original project.

The volunteers provide peer support to each other and now support thousands of people across Essex through these generous acts of kindness. Whether that is the knitters and crocheters making gloves, blankets, scarves and hats or worry worms and for get me notes to support dementia awareness, as well as supporting local breast cancer charities. Requests come from individuals, other charitable organisations, public services and most recently the ambulance service.

In November this wonderful project was a winner at Essex County Council’s Social Value celebration event, recognising the contributions of caring individuals and organisations across the county.

Ellen Van Gemmert, Essex Wellbeing Service Strategic Lead said: “Hug in a Shrug touches lives across generations – from newborns to our oldest resident aged 106 years! This project is more than knitting, it’s about knitting together a community with compassion and shared purpose.”

Notably, the initiative has proven to be a crucial support system for housebound individuals and has knitted more than 2000 items over the last three years. Recognising the potential and impact of the project, the

Essex Wellbeing Service is now exploring ways to replicate this model and inspire similar social groups across the county.

Ellen added: “The success of Hug in a Shrug lies in the selfless contributions of every volunteer and the support of the local community. These dedicated individuals not only offer their time and talent but also personal resources like wool and yarn, making their contributions true gifts of kindness.”

**To find out more about United in Kind or ‘Hug in a shrug’ please contact Sarah Sapsford at RCCE – [sarah.sapsford@essexrcc.org.uk](mailto:sarah.sapsford@essexrcc.org.uk)**

**You can also find out more on the ‘Hug in shrug’ Facebook page!**





# NFU President comes to Essex

**Adam Scott NFU Essex County Adviser reports on the Essex NFU Annual General Meeting for 2023.**

The National Farmers Union (NFU) has been representing farmers since 1908 so has seen many changes from the horse powered era to the machinery era with automated steering cultivating the fields of Essex today. The organisation is headed by its President, a farmer elected from its national membership and for the past six years Minette Batters from Wiltshire has been at the helm.

Minette is a tenant farmer who when not making the case for food and farming to government and in the media actually runs a beef farm and wedding barn venue. Question Time and the Today programme see nearly as much of her as does her farmyard! Doing Dessert Island Discs was a welcome interlude from her usual political debate.

The Essex NFU annual meeting was held at Writtle College University in November, a packed conference room sat eagerly waiting to hear Minette the key speaker. Having just announced she will step down in February 2024 she was able to review her time in office.

Few Presidents have dealt with such seismic changes during their time in charge, starting with Brexit and the dramatic changes to the agricultural policy that have followed. The old EU payments have been halved since we left the CAP and helping farmers adjust has been key. The transition to new schemes with a greater emphasis on public money for public goods, in particular the environment is welcomed but food production is also key.

Food security is a message that Minette has been debating throughout her time in office. Currently we produce 61 % of what we eat, which effectively means the UK is reliant on imports from early August to the end of the year. Empty shelves at the start of Covid and again when the impacts of the war in Ukraine hit have refocused attention on what is the right level of domestic food production.

Disruption to supply chains due to Brexit, Covid and Ukraine have all emphasised how more resilient food chains are needed. Much of this is down to the fairness in the



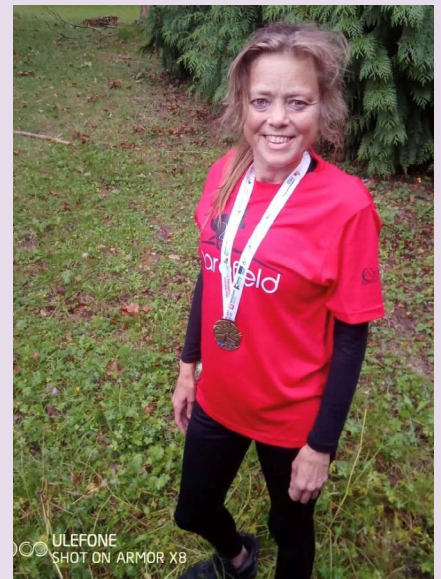
**Christy Willett Essex NFU Chair and Minette Batters NFU President**

supply chains where risks must be more evenly shared. Egg production is one area where the UK has seen production fall by 1 billion eggs since 2019 as prices received by farmers do not cover the escalating costs of the production itself.

In Minette's six years as President, she has worked with six different Secretaries of State at Defra and four Prime Ministers. Rushed trade deals and shortages of labour are two areas that are having lasting impacts long after their Ministerial proponents have left office.

So, while politics can continue with that level of instability stable and secure food production cannot. The members attending the meeting at Writtle were all left sensing how fortunate we have been to have such a calm and able leader in Minette during such a turbulent period.

The elections to replace Minette as President will happen in late February and current Deputy President Tom Bradshaw was nominated by the meeting for the top post. Tom is based at Fordham near Colchester so Essex farmers will be keeping a close eye on how this election goes.



## British Transplant Games 2023

**Here at RCCE we would like to congratulate a truly inspirational lady, Dawn Bostock who works as a Community Agent for Tendring.**

During Organ Donation Week in September Dawn raised awareness of the **NHS Organ Donation** highlighting what an amazing gift it is to help save and transform lives. Dawn herself has been given the gift of life not only once but twice! Dawn underwent a lung transplant 16 years ago and only just last year received a kidney. In recognition and with pure grit and determination Dawn proudly entered this summer's British Transplant Games 2023 that were held in Coventry. Dawn participated in a number of pursuits including darts, discus and won GOLD! In the ladies 200m running race (aged 40-49), what an achievement! Dawn also completed the 5km Donor Walk alongside many other transplant recipients and the families of donors.

Dawn said "It was truly an honour to hear so many stories or what a difference organ donation has made to so many lives, I am so grateful for every moment I have to enjoy life and be here. Making a difference in my role as a Community Agent and all the work I have contributed to in my various voluntary roles in the community. Please have the conversation with your family and loved ones about organ donation".

# A new plan for nature recovery

More than ever, wildlife and the habitats it needs to survive are under threat.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) will become the primary strategic plan in England to tackle the demands of the ecological emergency and help reverse biodiversity declines – and you have the chance to help shape this new future for Essex.

Essex County Council will create the Essex LNRS, which will become a comprehensive strategy to highlight existing spaces for nature and areas of importance for biodiversity, as well as showcasing key areas for nature recovery, helping to outline priorities.

Collaboration and consultation are essential to ensure the Essex LNRS becomes an effective tool in developing partnerships and action plans that more effectively support biodiversity and encourage collective activity that is focused where it can have the most benefit for wildlife.

You can stay up to date with how the Essex LNRS will be created, and its progress, by visiting the Essex Local Nature Partnership website. Here you will find details of upcoming information events, recordings of recent webinars, FAQs and the chance to sign up to the Essex Nature Partnership newsletter for more regular updates.

Visit [www.essexnaturepartnership.co.uk](http://www.essexnaturepartnership.co.uk)



## EALC wins NALC Star Council Award

Congratulations to the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) who were thrilled to be named Star National County Association of the Year 2023.

The Great Dunmow-based association were chosen for their innovative, forward-thinking and ongoing development over the past year by the judging panel of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). The organisation provides support, training, guidance, advice and grant funding opportunities for over 300 local town and parish councils across the county.

The award was presented by Baroness Scott, of Needham Market, president of NALC, at a ceremony held recently in Westminster at the House of Lords.

Charlene Slade, CEO of the association, on accepting the award, praised the hard work of the all the staff at the Gt Dunmow HQ and thanked the Executive Board, training tutors and Essex County Council for their continued support at a time when all councils are striving to maintain and improve their services to residents despite financial budget constraints.

**Photo above: L-R: Cllr Mike Eldred – EALC Vice-Chair, Baroness Scott of Needham Market – President of NALC, Charlene Slade – Chief Executive Officer at EALC, Cllr Peter Davey – EALC Chair**



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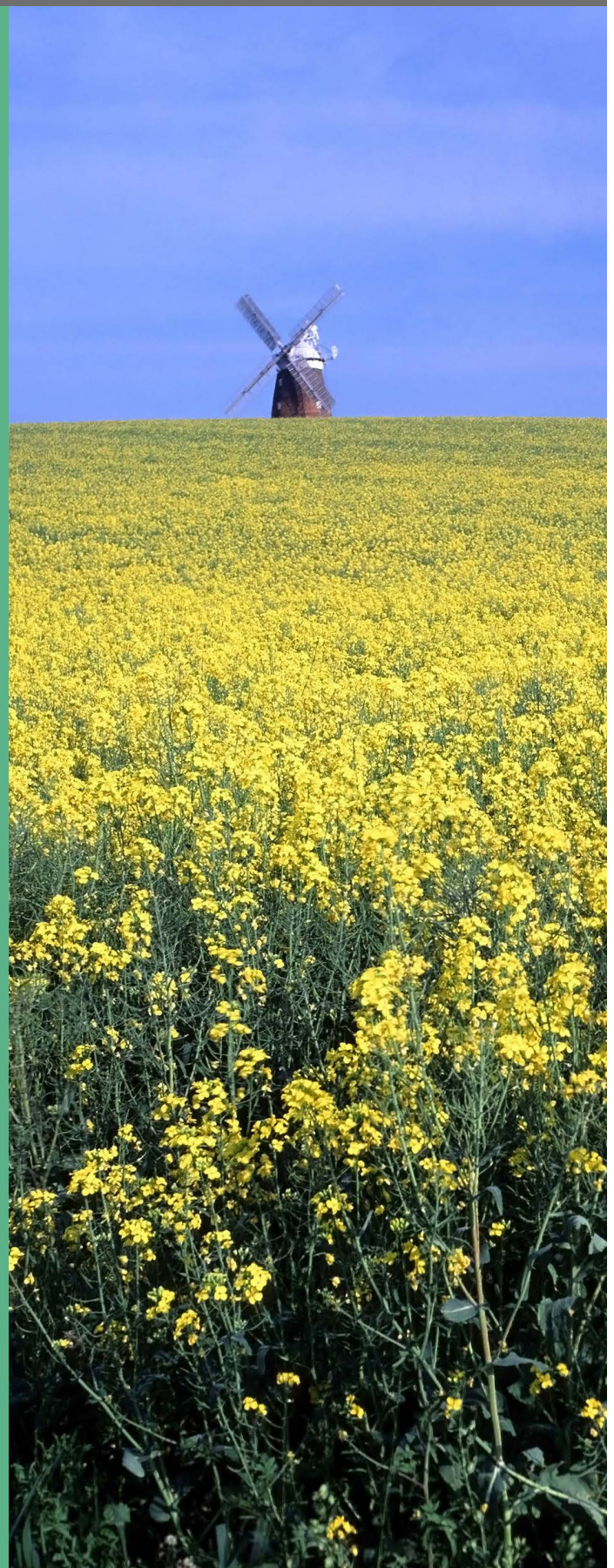
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 Sandra Burkin  
 Louise Mollison  
 Margaret Carter  
 Charlotte Riley  
 Jan McKay  
 Marion Buffett  
 Nicky Duhig  
 Steven Wilkins  
 Dawn Bostock  
 Trudie Horsman  
 Vicky Newbrook

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 Basildon  
 Basildon  
 Castle Point  
 Castle Point  
 Brentwood  
 Braintree  
 Braintree  
 Braintree  
 Braintree/Uttlesford  
 Maldon/Colchester  
 Maldon  
 Chelmsford  
 Chelmsford  
 Chelmsford  
 Colchester  
 Colchester  
 Epping Forest  
 Epping Forest  
 Harlow  
 Harlow/Uttlesford  
 Rochford  
 Rochford  
 Tendring  
 Tendring  
 Tendring  
 Tendring  
 Tendring

### United in Kind

Amy Melton  
 Ali Massey  
 Karis Galliano  
 Anna Wilson  
 Catherine Venables  
 Tracey Crook  
 Christine Chester  
 Corrina O'Donnell  
 H Goodwin  
 Jayne Laken  
 Amy Robelou  
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 Sarah Ayling  
 Rebecca Morton

### District

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 Castle Point  
 Tendring  
 Tendring  
 Uttlesford  
 Rochford  
 Colchester  
 Braintree  
 Brentwood  
 Chelmsford  
 Epping  
 Harlow  
 Essex Wellbeing Service  
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To email a member of the team please [CLICK HERE](#)

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 Vacancy  
 Vacancy  
 Carol Wakeman  
 Ruth Cooper-Gibson  
 Mirka Marri

### District

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 Castle Point  
 Colchester  
 Maldon  
 Rochford  
 Chelmsford  
 Basildon  
 Brentwood  
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“To provide local communities with the skills, resources and expertise necessary to achieve a thriving and sustainable future”

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