

RCCE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – SAVE THE DATE!



Date: Wednesday 9th July

Time: 6:30pm

Venue: Oaks Pavilion, Rivenhall Oaks Golf Centre CM8 2FX

Guest Speaker: The Rt. Revd. Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford and the Church of England's lead bishop for housing.

Featuring: Presentation of the Essex Village of the Year and Rural Community Awards 2025

VILLAGE HALLS WEEK

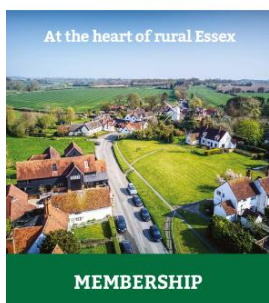


celebrating, encouraging & supporting volunteers
Village Halls Week • 17-23 March 2025

Village Halls Week is fast approaching! The theme for 2025 is celebrating, encouraging & supporting volunteers. We all know that without the volunteering army, much of the life we love and enjoy would stop, so now is

the time to celebrate and promote what the volunteers in your lives do for you. This includes village hall trustees and workers. So why not think about having an open day, an afternoon tea, a concert, a film night, a quiz or something else to celebrate your village hall. It is also an opportunity for management committees to think about succession planning and recruiting new volunteers, reminding people about the support and advice on offer from RCCE. Please [click here](#) to access some ACRE resources and if you do plan on holding an event, please let them know and they will promote it including adding your hall to their map. Please also tell Danielle Frost RCCE's Village Hall and Community Buildings Advisor as she will try her best to visit.

RCCE MEMBERSHIP EVENT



RCCE's new membership year starts on 1st April 2025 and we look forward to working with you all in 2025/26, whether returning members or new members. The membership fees and a schedule of events for 2025/26 will be circulated in March 2025

We are holding a Membership Event at our offices starting at 7pm until 8:30pm on Tuesday 25th March 2025.

Please [click here](#) for further information which can be shared with your councillors/committee members. The event is an opportunity for you to find out more about RCCE and for us to learn more about your activities and needs in the forthcoming year. We look forward to welcoming you to the event.

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN ESSEX NOW UNDERWAY



It was announced on 5th February that Greater Essex (the combined area currently represented by Essex County Council and Southend and Thurrock unitary councils) would be one of six areas included in the Government's Devolution Priority Programme. This will in effect be the first stage of a countrywide extension of devolution and a reorganisation of local government initiated through the English Devolution White Paper published last December.

It means that in Essex the existing structure of a county council, 2 unitary authorities and 12 district councils is very likely to be replaced over the next two to three years by a Combined County Authority, headed by a directly elected Mayor, and beneath this a number (yet to be specified) of new unitary authorities.

The Essex County Council election scheduled for this May has been postponed. No changes have been indicated for parish and town councils.

To initiate this process, the Government has launched a public consultation on establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Greater Essex, with provision made for the first Mayoral election to be held in May 2026. The new Combined Authority would be in line to receive devolved powers and funding for areas such as transport, infrastructure, housing, strategic planning, skills and employment. It could also receive a long-term investment fund from central government.

The public consultation which was launched on 17th February will be open until 13th April.

It can be accessed [here](#).

It is important to stress that this consultation will not consider the reorganisation of local government which will be subject to a separate process. On 5th February, all existing local authorities in the Greater Essex area were invited to undertake wide engagement before submitting proposals for new unitary authorities to Government by 26th September this year. The Government will then assess these proposals before determining which if any are to be implemented.

With 72% of the land area of Essex classified as rural and with more of a quarter of the county's population living in rural communities, it will be vitally important for the needs and concerns of rural Essex to be considered both in the consultation on a Mayoral Combined County Authority and on the question of local government reorganisation. In the coming months, RCCE will engage in this process and will monitor developments closely, providing members with regular updates through Warbler and other outlets.

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES “NATIONAL CONVERSATION” ON LAND USE



The Government has launched a consultation on a new approach to Land Use empowering decision makers with the toolkit to protect the most productive agricultural land and boost food security. The Government stated by using the most sophisticated land use data ever published, the Land Use Framework will provide the principles, advanced data and tools to support decision-making by

local government, landowners, businesses, farmers, and nature groups to make the most of our land. The announcement stated this will help deliver the different objectives the Government has for England's finite land, including growing food, building 1.5 million homes this parliament, and restoring nature. To read the announcement in full please [click here](#).

To complete the consultation please [click here](#).

DIGITAL ESSEX HAS CREATED A NEW TOOL TO HELP RESIDENTS ENHANCE THEIR DIGITAL SKILLS



The Digital Help Finder tool has been designed to:

- Assess current digital skills
- Highlight local courses and support services
- Assist residents in accessing devices, connectivity, and one-to-one support

This initiative helps residents gain essential digital skills for daily life. It can help to boost their confidence in online safety.

Community collaboration

Digital Essex worked with Community Voluntary Services (CVS) to make the tool. Councillor Lesley Wagland and the Digital Essex team launched it at The Hive in Loughton. Local Essex groups like Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) and South Essex Community Hub (SECH) are already using it to help learners and track their progress.

Councillor Louise McKinlay, who is the Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Communities, Economic Growth and Prosperity at Essex County Council explained how the council wants to make sure everyone can use digital tools.

"The Digital Help Finder tool is an example of our dedication to closing the digital divide. It encourages digital inclusion, addresses connectivity and affordable devices, and improves digital skills."

Case study: Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF)

VAEF has used the tool successfully in its Epping Forest Power Up programme. Nick Robinson, who manages VAEF's community response hub, explains that the tool helps close the digital gap and empowers people. It improves digital skills for learners, makes volunteers feel proud and involved, provides easy access to help with structured support, and increases community engagement and support.

"The Digital Help Finder tool is a great way for learners to check and boost their digital skills. It truly helps them in their daily lives."

Get involved

People and groups in Greater Essex are encouraged to use the Digital Help Finder. The Digital Essex team is available for demonstrations and further information. You can also sign up and use the tool here: [Digital Skills Platform - Essex](#)

For more details, contact the team at Digital@essex.gov.uk.

FREE INTRODUCTION TO RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING - MONDAY 24TH MARCH 12PM – 1PM



Concerned about rising house prices and unaffordability in rural areas? Is your rural parish less than 3,000 in population?

Join our Senior Rural Housing Enabler, Laura Atkinson and guest speaker Emily Mulvaney from English Rural Housing Association, for a FREE introduction to rural affordable housing where we will guide you through your options and showcase some examples of how communities have provided for their residents through schemes of quality affordable homes which are prioritised for those with a strong local connection to their parish.

Email laura.atkinson@essexrcc.org.uk to confirm attendance, and we will send you the Zoom link. To access RCCE's Rural Affordable Housing leaflet please click [here](#). We look forward to seeing you there, do share with all your councillors, all are welcome!

REGULATION 14 AND BEYOND - RCCE WEBINAR



RCCE is hosting a webinar on 9th April 2025, starting at 7.30pm, for Neighbourhood Plan groups who are finalising their pre-submission draft plan. The webinar will cover the process for the Regulation 14 statutory consultation, preparation of documents for submission under Regulation 15 and the processes for Regulation 16 and the Examination.

This event is for RCCE member parishes and member community organisations only

To book a place please email enquiries@essexrcc.org.uk

A link to the webinar will be circulated at the start of April to those who have booked.

INTERESTED IN JOINING US AND USING YOUR SKILLS TO SUPPORT RURAL COMMUNITIES IN ESSEX?



RCCE is always keen to hear from anyone interested in joining its Board of Trustees (governing body), especially if you share our passion for rural communities, have time to give and can bring skills, knowledge and experience that will help us to develop our work.

A trustee is a voluntary, unpaid position although reasonable expenses are covered. To find out more about the requirements of the role and what we are looking for [click here](#) for our Board of Trustees – guidance for applicants.



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