

Putting Rural
Communities
at the forefront

A Royal call to action:
National push for
affordable housing

Platinum Jubilee
Village Halls Fund
– Layer Marney

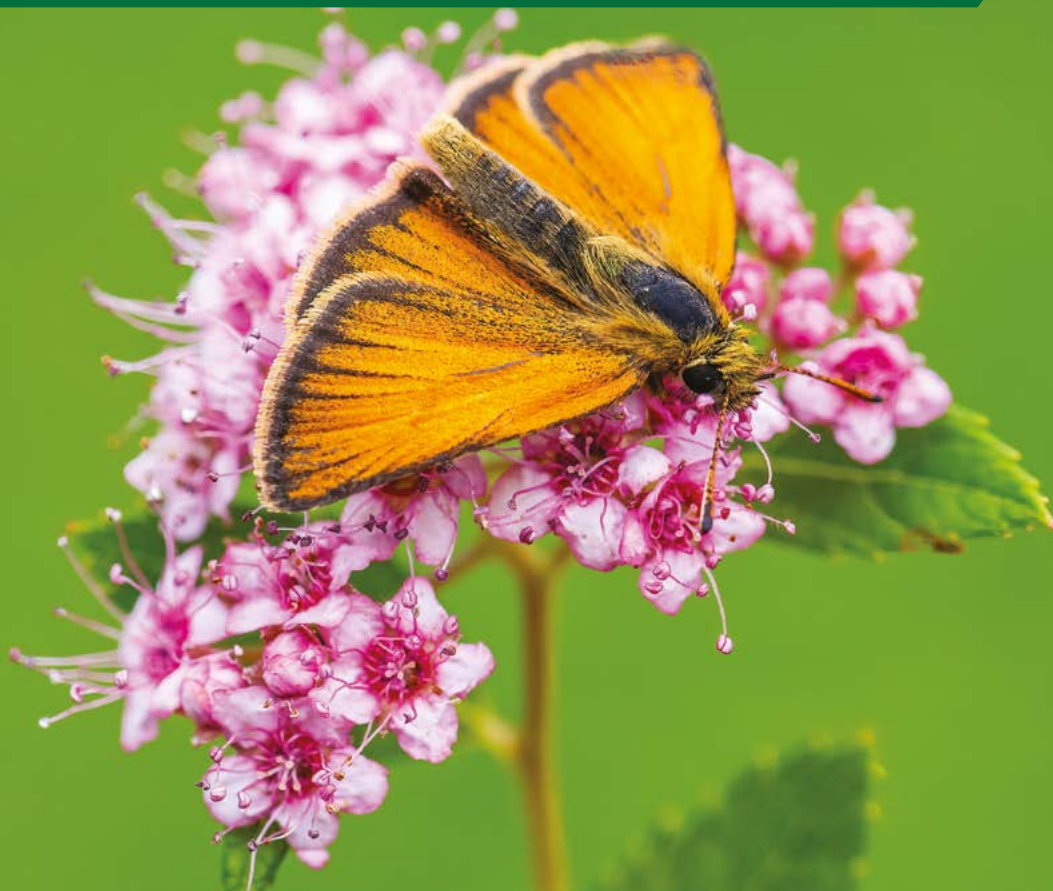
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THE VOICE OF RURAL ESSEX

Issue 53
Summer 2025



Upcoming RCCE Member Events



Nature Recovery Big Event

Host: Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)

Date: Saturday 13th September 2025

Time: All Day Event (Times to be confirmed)

Venue: Hatfield Peverel Village Hall, Maldon Road,
Hatfield Peverel, Essex CM3 2HP

The event is aimed at Town and Village Parish Councils including interested groups that want to support nature recovery in their area.



Guest speakers include:

- Professor Jules Pretty, Emeritus Prof of Environment and Society at the University of Essex
- Dr Simon Lyster, Chairman of the Essex County Council Local Nature Recovery Strategy Committee
- Tim Simpson, Interim Head of Climate Adaptation & Mitigation
- Environment and Climate Action, Essex County Council

Workshop

Get an insight from other parishes and organisations who are already proactive with making changes and hopefully able to enthuse others to make changes too.

Full details can be found on the RCCE website:
<https://www.essexrcc.org.uk/>

Places will be limited, this is a paid for event lunch will be provided.



🐦 @RCCEssex

☎ 01376 574330

🌐 www.essexrcc.org.uk

Cover: Cllr. Jane Taylor, Chair of White Colne Parish Council, the 2025 Essex Village of the Year.

Contents

RCCE AGM 2025	4
AGM Award Winners	6
Community Agents	7
A Royal call to action: National push for affordable rural housing	8
Celebrating a New Chapter – United in Kind Becomes Kinder Essex	9
Rural England Prosperity Fund	10
Putting Rural Communities at the forefront	12
Did you know?	14
Growing Communities Healthy Packed Lunch Plot Competition	14
A History of Village Halls	15
Empowering Thaxted: A New Chapter in Community-Led Housing	16
Keeping animals safe	17
Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund	18
Feeding the Nation	19
CCTV Registry	19
RABI	20
Tri Service Rural Community Officers	21



From the Director

Having been included in the Government's Devolution Priority Programme at the start of the year, local government here in Essex faces a radical overhaul within the next three years. Essex County Council, a cornerstone of the county since 1889 is set for abolition along with the existing unitary authorities and district councils, the latter of which have been in existence themselves for over 50 years. Only the most local tier of government, and one particularly important to many readers of this magazine, the parish and town councils, look set to emerge largely intact.

In place of the existing higher-tier authorities, will come a directly elected Mayor, for whom we will vote as soon as next May, heading up a new Mayoral Combined County Authority for Greater Essex (the area currently under the jurisdiction of Essex County Council and Southend and Thurrock unitary authorities) and beneath this a yet to be specified number of new unitary authorities, with proposals ranging from three to five being floated.

Devolution certainly has its attractions with the prospect of devolved powers and budgets for matters such as housing, transport and skills residing within the county in future. It is also suggested that it could help secure greater synergy between local government boundaries and those of other sectors such as health, with the

likelihood of a single Integrated Care Board (ICB) being created for Greater Essex.

To be truly effective, however, devolution needs to be multi-layered with powers devolved by Whitehall to Greater Essex matched by a diffusion of power within the county. This is particularly important in rural areas where local identities remain strong and where things are done differently. At present, for instance, many valued local amenities in rural communities are provided by parish and town councils and voluntary organisations rather than by principal local authorities.

RCCE submitted a response to the public consultation on the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority, which closed in April. The focus now has switched to the reorganisation of local government, which is likely to prove more controversial. The existing local authorities in the county have until 26th September to submit their proposals for change, although the final say will rest with the Government.

RCCE will continue to engage with this process to help ensure the importance of rural Essex, which constitutes more than 70% of the land area of the county, and the needs of its rural communities are fully recognised.

Nick Shuttleworth
Executive Director

RCCE AGM 2025

– a Celebration of Rural Essex

On a warm summer's evening, almost 100 members, supporters and guests of RCCE gathered at Rivenhall Oaks Golf Centre on 9th July for the 2025 Annual General Meeting.

The climax of the evening came when HM Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, Mrs. Jennifer Tolhurst, presented the prizes for this year's **Essex Village of the Year and Rural Community Awards**, generously sponsored by Essex & Suffolk Water, Norris & Fisher Insurance Brokers Ltd and Utility Aid.

White Colne with a population of 501 celebrated its first ever **Essex Village of the Year** title. In the words of its own entry submission, this is a small village that "punches above its weight". The village hall, located in the former station master's house, is at the heart of community life providing a bi-monthly community café as well as a weekly warm hub that offers residents subsidised meals, wifi and solar-generated warmth. It also has its own kitchen garden, charging points for electric vehicles and was chosen by Braintree District Council as the venue for its 'Social Supermarket'. Aside from the village hall, White Colne boasts its own community orchard, village green and a new natural play area.

In the words of its own entry submission, this is a small village that "punches above its weight"

Alresford claimed second prize maintaining its excellent record in this competition. Evidence of community engagement abounds here, with the village hall, playing field and pavilion, and parish church always busy hosting community events and activities, including a farmers' market at the village hall. Volunteers have transformed the garden at the village's railway station and there are now plans to rejuvenate the station building itself as a community café and museum.

Third prize went to **Arkesden**, where in recent years, the community helped to salvage the village's only pub, 'The Axe

and Compasses', enabling it to re-open within a year. It now stands alongside the village hall, church and Millennium Field as a focal point of village life, with all hosting community activities and events including sports days, folk bands and seasonal celebrations. Plans for the future include an upgrade for the village playground and initiatives to welcome new residents.

As in 2024, RCCE again augmented the Village of the Year awards with three special **Rural Community Awards**.

The Community Enterprise Award was won for the second consecutive year by the **Lion Corner Community Shop, Abberton & Langenhoe**. Set up at the height of the pandemic, it quickly established itself as a beacon of hope for the community. The shop, run entirely by volunteers is based in the former village pub and opens 7 days a week closing only on Christmas Day. It also provides a weekly visiting post office, and a percentage of its annual net profit is allocated to the village Community Benefit





Bishop Guli spoke about the challenges faced by rural parishes in the Diocese today and very appropriately in Rural Housing Week, she spoke about her work as the Church of England's lead bishop for housing

The formal business of the meeting included some significant changes to RCCE's Board of Trustees. Four long-serving members who had served the organisation with distinction – Roger Brice, Simon Brice, Simon Lyster and Sarah Pinkerton – retired having served the maximum term of office. In their place, three new Trustees were elected – Stewart Calvy, Beverly Davies and Robert Gazely – together with Martin Stuchfield, who returns to serve a further term.

The meeting also featured the presentation of RCCE's Annual Review 2024/25. This provides a snapshot of the organisation's work across 2024/25, detailing progress on issues such as affordable rural housing, village halls, neighbourhood planning, health and wellbeing and social isolation.

RCCE would like to record its thanks to Simon Brice and family and the whole team at Rivenhall Oaks Golf Centre for kindly hosting another enjoyable and successful AGM.



community, those suffering bereavement or coping with retirement.

The Village Hall and Community Building Award was awarded to the **War Memorial Hall, Felsted** which celebrated 100 years of service to the village in 2024. Managed by volunteer trustees who have introduced measures to improve energy efficiency, it provides a range of facilities and plays host to numerous clubs, activities and events including a very popular annual pantomime.

The RCCE AGM is about much more than awards. This year, we were delighted to welcome the Bishop of Chelmsford, The Rt. Revd. Guli Francis-Dehqani, as our guest speaker. Bishop Guli spoke about the challenges faced by rural parishes in the Diocese today and very appropriately in Rural Housing Week, she spoke about her work as the Church of England's lead bishop for housing. This included initiatives to follow up on the Church's 'Coming Home' report and on the need for more affordable housing in rural communities. As a model of what could be achieved, Bishop Guli highlighted the scheme at Roxwell, near Chelmsford, where the Diocese and RCCE had worked together with a specialist housing association, English Rural, to provide a small development on glebe land tailored to meet local needs.

Society, which provides funds local groups and individuals in need.

The Community and Voluntary Group Award went to **Loopy Loo's Ladies Group, Shotgate**. This is a volunteer-led initiative dedicated to empowering women of all ages through companionship, creativity and support. The group is committed to countering social isolation, especially among older women, newcomers to the



AGM AWARD WINNERS

Essex Village of the Year



Winner: White Colne (£500)

2nd Prize: Alresford (£200)

3rd Prize: Arkesden (£100)

Highly Commended: Shotgate

Sponsored by Essex & Suffolk Water

Rural Community Awards



Community Enterprise Award

Winner: Lion Corner Community Shop, Abberton & Langenhoe (£200)

Highly Commended: Little Dunmow Community Buildings Trust (£100)



Community and Voluntary Group Award

Sponsored by Norris & Fisher Insurance Brokers Ltd.

Winner: Loopy Loo's Friendship Group, Shotgate (£200)

Highly Commended: The Thursday Lunch Club, Heybridge (£100)



Village Hall and Community Building Award *Sponsored by Utility Aid*

Winner: War Memorial Hall, Felsted (£200)

Highly Commended: Alresford (£100), Molehill Green (£100)

Community Agents

It's been another busy year for the Essex Wellbeing Service and for RCCE's Community Agents team.

Essex Wellbeing Service supports people with a range of health and wellbeing topics, from stopping smoking to increasing social connections. One service that RCCE provides is the Community Agents Service. This year we have seen enquiries into the service increase by over 1000.

With 32 Community Agents covering the county (except Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock), support is always nearby. Community Agents is unique in offering a free to access home visiting service to those who would benefit from one across Essex. This might be due to caring responsibilities, or living in an isolated area with mobility issues or living with health conditions.

People can often be disadvantaged in accessing help due to these challenges. Home visits also allows the client to feel more comfortable in their own surroundings and agents can identify any other needs that would benefit from support.

If you would like to know more about Community Agents please contact our enquires: enquiries@caessex.org.uk

Or if you want to make a referral into the service:

<https://essexwellbeing.co.uk>

Email: provide.essexwellbeing@nhs.net

Tel: 0300 303 9988

Open Monday to Friday 8.00am – 7.00pm

Saturday 9.00am – 12.00pm

Sarah Sapsford Community Engagement & Services Manager

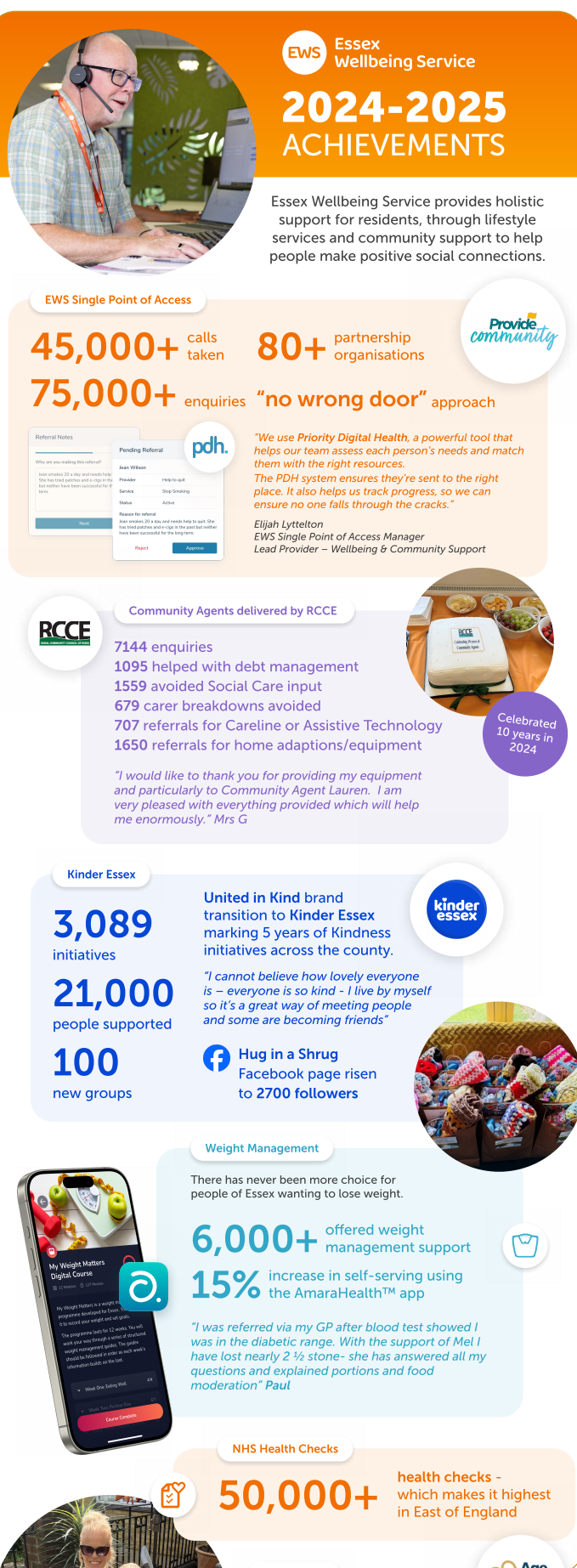
- To view the full version of the infographic opposite please visit <https://www.essexrcc.org.uk/our-work/community-agents-essex>

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 please visit the below website for our Board of Trustees and guidance for applicants: <https://www.essexrcc.org.uk/trustee>





A Royal call to action: National push for affordable rural housing

In April, a major event brought the rural housing crisis to the heart of the capital.



ENGLISH RURAL



Held at the historic Coram campus in London, the conference – ***“Affordable Rural Housing: Opportunity in Changing Times”*** – gathered housing experts, campaigners, local leaders, and policymakers to tackle one big question: how do we keep our countryside communities alive and thriving?

Jointly hosted by English Rural and Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), the day focused on one of the UK’s most pressing but often overlooked issues – the shortage of affordable homes in rural areas.

A highlight of the event was a keynote speech by HRH The Princess Royal, Patron of English Rural, who made a heartfelt appeal for long-term solutions to help rural areas grow sustainably. She pointed out that rural housing isn’t just about

bricks and mortar – it’s about people, communities, and opportunity. “We’re not just talking about houses,” she said. “We’re talking about the people and communities that make our countryside live and breathe.”

Other experts brought about a variety of perspectives on the rural housing crisis, amongst them Pauline, a resident in an English Rural home in Kent. Her moving

“We’re not just talking about houses,” she said. “We’re talking about the people and communities that make our countryside live and breathe.”



HRH The Princess Royal, Laura Atkinson, Senior Rural Housing Enabler, RCCE and Vince Walsh, Rural Housing Enabler, Community Action Northumberland.

story described how secure, affordable housing turned her family's life around and reminded the listeners why this work matters.

Among those speaking on the day was Laura Atkinson, our Senior Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) at RCCE, who works across Essex helping local parishes find creative, community-led housing solutions.

In her talk on the role of Rural Housing Enablers, Laura joined her fellow RHE, Vince Walsh from Northumberland, to share stories of success from the ground. From small villages bringing life back to disused plots, to young families finally finding somewhere they can afford to stay, her message was clear: real change is possible when local voices are heard and supported.

"With the right support and guidance, communities CAN deliver."

She also stressed the importance of funding the Rural Housing Enabler programme, local experts like herself who help communities turn ideas into real lasting housing solutions. HRH The Princess Royal backed this message, calling for a national strategy and better infrastructure planning to unlock rural potential.

"With the right support and guidance, communities CAN deliver."

The statistics shared during the day were striking: the average rural home now costs over £418,000, but the average rural salary is only £25,600. And although 18% of England's population lives in rural areas, just 10% of affordable homes are being built there. That mismatch is unsustainable.

The Coram campus was a fitting venue, steeped in a history of social reform, and the tone of the day was hopeful and action oriented.

Alongside powerful speeches and lively networking, there was a clear message: affordable rural housing is about more than homes – it's about securing the future of our villages and countryside.

For more detail on the conference please visit: <https://englishrural.org.uk/affordable-rural-housing-a-royal-call-to-action-for-our-countryside/>



Celebrating a New Chapter – United in Kind Becomes Kinder Essex

At the start of this year, we proudly marked a major milestone - five years of building connections and tackling social isolation across Essex - by rebranding United in Kind as Kinder Essex.

The new name reflects the same mission that has guided us since day one: spreading kindness, strengthening communities, and helping people feel more connected. After half a decade of impactful work, the rebrand felt like the perfect way to celebrate how far we've come while looking ahead to the future.

Our community coaches celebrated across Essex and organised special activities in care homes, libraries, and schools, bringing people together through small acts of kindness, shared stories, and inclusive fun. These events highlighted the power of connection and reminded us all how even small gestures can make a big difference.

As part of the rebrand, we also launched our new Facebook Page, which has quickly become a hub for Kinder Essex updates, Coach highlights and local events. We are encouraging everyone to follow us on social media and get involved, whether that's attending a local project, volunteering, or simply sharing a kind word online – it all plays a part!

Kinder Essex may be a new name, but our values remain the same. We are still here to build a kinder, more connected Essex – and we hope you'll continue to be part of that journey with us.

Follow us on Facebook @KinderEssex and join the kindness movement today!

Rural England Prosperity Fund – Maldon District



Throughout 2024 and into 2025, RCCE supported Maldon District Council's Economic Development Team in the management and distribution of their allocation of the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

“The REPF funding has changed our business in ways we only dreamed would be possible.”

The fund, which formed part of the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund, is co-ordinated nationally by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and DEFRA; with £430,328 being allocated to the Maldon district to help support new and existing rural businesses as well providing new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential services and assets for local people.

The Nuclear Restoration Service, (formerly known as Magnox), generously provided money from their socio economic grant scheme to fund a post to assist in the programme.

After much behind the scenes work, the fund was officially launched to the public in February 2024 via two very well attended events, one being the town and parish councils' forum at Heybridge Village Hall, the other being a business breakfast at Clayhill Vineyard, with thanks to Dale Symonds and the team there.

Business applicants were only required to invest 20% of their project cost (REPF funding up to 80%), this intervention rate made the fund a very attractive proposition with charities and community groups

provided with 100%. Also, the simplicity of the application process and support provided by specialists from RCCE, MDC and the Let's Do Business Group, made the process very straight forward and user friendly.

The then Government and the Council had set out very clear criteria for what could and couldn't be funded and the Council had also emphasised that they wanted as many organisations and people as possible to benefit, so making £430,328 go as far as possible was the aim. As well as this, applicants had to prove that the funding would fulfil the objectives of Maldon District Council's Corporate Plan, namely:

- Supporting our communities
- Investing in our district
- Growing our economy

It is heartening to hear of businesses taking on new employees off the back of the funding, and to also see businesses extending their markets and sales.

Interest came from a wide variety of organisations and groups across the district with the majority of enquiries coming in the Spring of last year. Thirty eight applications made it through to the panel assessment stage, with others being declined due to lack of suitability. That said, many of these were directed to other funds and other forms of assistance. Of the thirty-eight, twenty-one were awarded funding and the full £430,328 was allocated – so none of the money went back to HM Treasury and it was all spent in the district!

Fourteen businesses received funding, seven of whom were in the food and drink sector. Of the other seven recipients, one was the refurbished multi use games area in Southminster, another was a caravan park and the other four were improvements to the businesses

RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND

operating methods or business premises.

Of the seven community groups and charities that received funding, two were maritime heritage projects, one an archaeological club. Others included a community radio station, replacement yurt skins for a well-known, local, community providing retreats, a church/community hall and a van to transport community gaming equipment around the district.

The consensus of opinion seems to be that the REPF programme in the Maldon District was well delivered and well received. The collaboration between Maldon District Council, RCCE, Let's Do Business Group and assisted by NRS Bradwell all worked well and while not everyone got everything they wanted, the majority of eligible projects got sufficient to make a difference to their operations. It is heartening to hear of businesses taking on new employees off the back of the funding, and to also see businesses extending their markets and sales. For the community based projects, it is also encouraging to know that the funding made game changing differences to the way communities are being served.

Amy Morris from Datum Attitude Brewery and Tap Room summed up her and her husband Sam's experience as follows;

"The REPF funding has changed our business in ways we only dreamed would be possible. It has allowed us to invest in equipment that we were a good 5-7 years away from being able to buy without the funding.

Receiving the funding for this significant equipment purchase enabled us to take the step of upscaling into much larger commercial premises knowing that we would, at last, be able to meet the additional demand for our products. Since receiving the funding and upscaling our turnover has increased by more than 400%. We have been able to work on commission projects with the Royal Air Force, a FTSE 100 company and another significant international business. But what we are most proud of is that within 6 months of completing our funded project we have created two full time jobs, made a veteran friendly space and given local people a much needed, friendly and welcoming community place to enjoy."

For information on the projects funded and details on this year's REPF, please visit Maldon District Council's website.



Top: Black Pig Café – Heybridge. Middle: Datum Attitude Brewery – Maldon. Bottom: Othona Community – Bradwell on Sea

Putting Rural Communities at the forefront

As the Essex Rural Fund celebrates its 16th anniversary with Essex Community Foundation, there is a renewed drive to raise awareness of issues in rural communities and to get more people involved. **By Anne Fitzgerald and Jo Macaulay**



Essex is well known for its cities including Chelmsford, Colchester and Southend, as well as its busy ports like Harwich, and urban areas such as Basildon. But Essex has another equally important side to its character, its lovely rural areas.

The Essex Rural Fund, set up 16 years ago, is playing a vital role in helping people in the rural parts of the county, by supporting community groups and charities working in these areas.

The fund, run by the independent charitable trust Essex Community Foundation (ECF) was launched in 2009 by the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) to help celebrate its 80th anniversary.

Nick Charrington, who is President of RCCE and is also a panel member for the Essex Rural Fund said: "Around 70 per cent of Essex is rural and about a quarter of the population lives in rural communities. Our coastline is also the longest of any county in England.

"When you drive or walk through rural Essex all looks well, but underneath that picture of tranquility, there is a lot of deprivation. Services such as shops, buses and other local facilities have been cut back and this has had a big effect, making practical issues such as visiting

We want the Essex Rural Fund to keep on growing and, as it is an endowment fund, the bigger it gets the more it can continue giving grants on a long-lasting basis

family or getting to work really difficult.

"The Essex Rural Fund is tackling these issues and is making a difference in a lot of areas. Since it was set up it has given grants totalling almost £190,000 to a whole range of projects and initiatives in the county's rural communities. It has also supported many local assets including village halls, Scout groups, Men's Sheds, community shops, pubs and post offices.

"With support and encouragement from the Essex Rural Fund people are rising to the challenge and keeping their rural communities alive.

"Sometimes a grant goes to something that might seem to be unglamorous but is actually quite important. An example is a grant given to Rayne village hall which needed some money to replace their very

old boilers. Rayne is a small village, and the hall plays an important role in hosting a wide range of activities throughout the week that bring people together. These include dance and exercise classes for children and adults, karate, youth football, carpet bowls and a WI. Without the new boilers, the village hall couldn't stay open, as it wouldn't have met the necessary regulations.'

Nick added, "One of the main problems in rural areas is loneliness, and village halls such as the one mentioned are at the heart of the community, helping to bring people together, keeping them active and alert.

"If communities can be helped to keep local facilities alive then isolation is reduced. It also provides people with opportunities for volunteering, which can improve their wellbeing.

The foresight of the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) to set up the Essex Rural Fund 16 years ago has established a strong foundation to improve the lives of thousands of people in the county, now and into the future.

"We want the Essex Rural Fund to keep on growing and, as it is an endowment fund, the bigger it gets the more it can continue giving grants on a long-lasting basis", said Nick.

As the fund is celebrating its 16th anniversary in 2025, Nick and others are aiming to raise awareness about what the Fund is doing and are encouraging people to get involved.

Join the annual Essex Rural Fund Walk

The Essex Rural Fund annual walk has been a firm fixture of Essex life for several years. As always, the focus is on gentle exercise, good company, beautiful surroundings and the opportunity to support a good cause.

If you would like to join the walk next year, please email nicholas@layermarneytower.co.uk

Statistics for rural Essex:



72%

72% of the surface area of Essex is designated as rural.



£465,207

The average house price in rural Essex is £465,207 which can be as much as 12 times average earnings, thus pricing local people out of the market.



25%

25% of households in rural Essex are off the mains gas grid.



Rural Community Council of Essex

RCCE has been at the heart of rural Essex for more than 90 years, working as a charity to help local communities build a thriving and sustainable future. Current priorities include improving the provision of affordable housing, sustaining community facilities such as village halls and tackling the problem of social isolation.

In 1929 one man, Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, had the idea to create the RCCE. A disciple of John Ruskin, Mackmurdo's work as an architect, designer and writer had influenced the Arts and Crafts movement and helped introduce the 'art nouveau' style to England.

Mackmurdo lived latterly in the village

of Great Totham, where his work to provide a village hall convinced him of the need for an organisation able to support and sustain rural communities across the whole county.

As part of the celebrations and to mark its 80th birthday in 2009, RCCE decided to establish the Essex Rural Fund as an endowed fund within Essex Community Foundation.

Nick Shuttleworth, Executive Director of RCCE said: 'We wanted to do something which would have a lasting effect and are delighted that the Essex Rural Fund is proving its worth, providing such valuable support for community groups and charities working in the rural parts of the county.'

Charities and community groups that have recently benefited from support from the Essex Rural Fund are:

1st Ashingdon Scout Group received £1,000 to help repair and install additional fencing at a community project to restore an area of meadow and woodland.

Ferriers Barn in Bures received £941 to support the running of a Day Centre for adults with a multiple disability.



High Easter Cricket Club needed some help to repair and redecorate the showers in their well-used pavilion and received £970.

Lamarsh Lion Community Pub is a focal point in this rural village and they received £1,600 which helped them with their running costs and enabled them to buy some planters to enhance the outdoor area at the pub.

Local Food (& More!) Co-operative received £2,000 towards building a new shed for carrying out electric and mechanical works and a repair shop in the rural villages of Little Canfield and Dunmow.

Uttlesford Buffy Bus is a mobile play centre in the form of a double decker bus which travels around the rural villages in Uttlesford. A grant of £3,000 is helping them to continue providing play and activities to families with young children.

Wethersfield Community Activities received £4,680 to continue running their Bump, Baby, and Toddler Group.

This article originally appeared in Essex Life Magazine



To find out more about the Essex Rural Fund please visit www.essexcommunityfoundation.enthouse.com/cf/essex-rural-fund

There is also an informative youtube video featuring Nicholas Charrington – to access this please use the QR code.

Did you know?

Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) works in partnership with Affinity Fuels for your heating oil needs!



We are excited to provide our community this opportunity by offering a reliable, cost-effective solution for heating oil.

Who are Affinity Fuels?

Affinity Fuels is a UK-based company that supplies domestic heating oil to rural communities, making the purchasing process easier and more cost-effective. It operates as part of the AF Group, the UK's largest agricultural co-operative, supporting over 3,000 farming businesses nationwide.

Interested in joining?

Please register by calling the team on 01603 881888 (Monday to Friday, 8am – 5pm). There are no joining fees.

Already a customer?

You can check prices and order heating oil online 24/7, 7 days a week at www.affinityfuels.co.uk

To avoid account duplication, please make sure you've activated your online account using the activation link previously sent to you. If you require a new link? Please email enquiries@af-affinity.co.uk to request one.

Meet Amanda – Our New Fuels Manager

We are excited to introduce Amanda, our new Affinity Fuels Manager. With a passion for great service and years of experience in the heating oil industry, Amanda is here to ensure our customers always get the support they need whether it's a quick question about an order or advice on fuel options.

Working with Affinity Fuels, we're proud to welcome new customers and continue building strong relationships with our long-time clients. Whether you reach out online, over the phone, or by email, Amanda and the team are always ready to help.

You can follow Affinity fuels on Instagram and Facebook and for further information and FAQ's please visit www.affinityfuels.co.uk.

Growing Communities Healthy Packed Lunch Plot Competition

Winners Announced!



Having been absent since the pandemic we decided it was about time the Healthy Packed Lunch Plot Competition should return!



Runner up prizes included gardening Equipment and educational Books for the school.

The Essex Schools Food and Farming Day is a yearly event organised by the Essex Agricultural Society giving 3,000 Essex school children aged 8 to 11 the opportunity to visit ARU Writtle and find out how their food is produced, the role played by farmers in Essex and the many related jobs within the industry.

RCCE Growing Communities would like to thank the Augustine Courtauld Trust for their continued support which enables the project to continue its work with helping educate children about the provenance of where their food comes from. We would also like to thank The Essex Agricultural Society and the Healthy Schools Initiative for collaborative work with Growing Communities.

To find more about Growing Communities please visit www.essexrcc.org.uk

For more information on the Essex Food and Farming Day please visit www.essexag.co.uk

The competition is part of Growing Communities, a project that is managed by the RCCE. It encourages young people to research healthy food alternatives for their packed lunch by creating scrumptious recipes and not only that but how to grow some of the ingredients also.

2025 Results

Winner

Birch Church of England Primary School with their entry 'Healthy Delights'

Runner Up

Wethersfield Primary School with their entry 'Timothy'

Congratulations to both schools it proved to be a tough competition to judge!

The prizes this year included: First Prize up to £500 towards the cost of coach travel to the popular Essex Schools Food and Farming Day that was held in June including a guaranteed place kindly reserved by the Essex Agricultural Society, gardening equipment and educational books for the school.





Silver End Village Hall

Halls for All: A History of Village Halls

Louise Beaton OBE has been dedicated to supporting village halls and community buildings for over 40 years.

She recently stepped down as a trustee of Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) but remains a trusted adviser and ardent protector of the sector. Over the last few years, Louise and her colleague David Clark have been writing a book, documenting the history of all sorts of community buildings across England. This year 'Halls for All' has been published and amongst all the halls there is mention of a few in Essex, namely, the Grade 1 Guildhall at Finchingfield, the Hewitt Memorial Hall Dedham, Great Totham, Silver End and Stock.

The Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) also has a special mention for its mobile cinema unit which could be regularly seen around the county from 1939. The book is very well written and interesting to read, especially if you have an interest in halls.

RCCE has purchased a number of copies which Louise has signed and these are available to buy for further information please contact via email RCCE's Village

Halls and Community Buildings Adviser Danielle Frost: Danielle.frost@essexrcc.org.uk. The book is also available from booksellers at £16.99, online from publisher Amberley or through the library service.

Louise kindly shared these remarks with us:

Don't be misled by the title of this new book: it's not just a history of village halls or, indeed, only about "village halls". "Halls for All" is the first book to tell the story of all kinds of community buildings, from their early beginnings through to the needs of rural areas following the two World Wars to the present day, not forgetting the Covid pandemic. The first person to review it said it contains, "many useful recommendations and insights for trustees and managers of community halls today".

In writing it David Clark and I were also keen that the lessons, the current challenges and opportunities for halls be brought to public attention, some of those we address being directly relevant to the agenda of Government at all levels, such as house-building, delivery of health services,

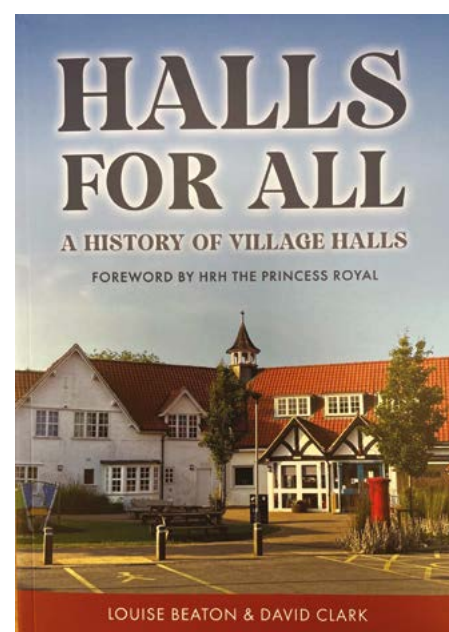
'Halls for All' contains a wealth of information which should interest hall trustees, parish and town councillors and clerks (whether or not their Council runs a hall) and planners, architects, developers and local historians.

economic growth and climate change. So 'Halls for All' contains a wealth of information which should interest hall trustees, parish and town councillors and clerks (whether or not their Council runs a hall) and planners, architects, developers and local historians.

There is a story behind the title "Halls for All" and we hope the book will help anyone interested in researching their own hall history. St Osyth Village Club, for example, featured in the first design guidance for Village Clubs and Halls, published in 1920. Essex RCC may also have information in the files to help you.

A foreword by HRH The Princess Royal pays tribute to the volunteers who run our halls, and to the local authorities, funders and charities who support them.

Louise Beaton, May 2025





Empowering Thaxted: A New Chapter in Community-Led Housing

In the heart of the picturesque and historically rich town of Thaxted, Essex, a transformative housing initiative is now underway – a testament to what a community can achieve when it comes together with a shared vision.

The Thaxted Community Land Trust (TCLT), established to meet local housing needs, is now bringing its first affordable housing scheme to life on Bardfield Road.

Rooted in Local Need and Aspirations

Although Thaxted is widely recognised as an affluent rural area, home to beautiful historic buildings and a deep social heritage, a persistent issue has emerged in recent years: a lack of affordable housing for local people. This concern came to the forefront during community consultations for the Thaxted Neighbourhood Development Plan (2019). The majority of residents who responded stated clearly that there was not enough local housing at affordable prices or rents.

As a direct response to this shared concern, Thaxted Community Land Trust was formed. With support from Thaxted Parish Council, a board of local community members

formally constituted the TCLT in January 2021. Their goal: to deliver housing that genuinely meets the needs of local people.

"This project is all about keeping Thaxted a living, working community," said a spokesperson for the Thaxted Community Land Trust. "We heard loud and clear from local people that affordability was a major concern. These new homes represent our commitment to ensuring that local families can stay in the place they call home, now and into the future."

Turning Plans into Reality

The site now under development on Bardfield Road was specifically identified in the Neighbourhood Plan as suitable for community-led housing. After meaningful community engagement and collaboration, a business plan was created and the TCLT forged a partnership with the English Rural Housing Association, a not-for-profit organisation specialising in rural affordable homes.

Together, they are delivering the first TCLT development, a modest but highly significant scheme of four affordable rental homes, which includes:

- Two one-bedroom maisonettes
- Two two-bedroom houses

Each home is designed with the future in mind, incorporating:

- Air Source Heat Pumps
- Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems
- Electric vehicle charging points
- Private gardens with cycle storage, water butts, and clothes drying lines

Affordable Homes for Local People, Forever

A key principle of the project is that these homes will remain genuinely affordable in perpetuity, safeguarded by the TCLT for the benefit of the community. Local people will have a priority into the homes, and there will be no opportunity



for tenants to purchase them – ensuring that the homes remain part of Thaxted's affordable housing stock for generations to come.

This is the first CLT-led housing development in Uttlesford District, setting an important precedent for how local action can lead to real, sustainable solutions to rural housing challenges.

A Collaborative Effort

This success story is built on cooperation: between the community, the Parish Council, the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE), and English Rural. The RCCE supported the CLT through much of the early work to get it off the ground, as well as undertaking the initial 2021 Housing Needs Survey which provided vital evidence to support the demand from local households.

Next Steps and Getting Involved

Residents who wish to be considered for one of the new homes should register with both:

- Uttlesford District Council via the Home Option partnership
- English Rural Housing Association (details available at thaxted.englishrural.org.uk)

This development is more than just bricks and mortar – it's about preserving Thaxted's identity, sustaining its community, and ensuring that local people can continue to live, work, and thrive in the place they call home.

How can RCCE help your community?
If you would like to get in touch with our Senior Rural Housing Enabler and Community Led Housing Advisor, Laura Atkinson, to discuss the affordable housing needs of your parish or community, do email laura.atkinson@essexrcc.org.uk

Keeping animals safe

Livestock worrying is a major concern for Essex Police but one we aim to tackle, says Sergeant Paul Brady



The work of the Essex Police Rural Engagement Team is incredibly diverse. But, whatever we are doing, supporting rural communities and businesses is at the heart of our role.

Sadly, we do see attacks on livestock in Essex. The NFU says attacks have risen 50% across the UK since before the pandemic. The cost to UK farming is £1.8million a year, up from £1.2million before the pandemic.

It appears a rise in dog ownership during the Covid period has meant a corresponding rise in attacks on livestock since.

When NFU Mutual carried out a survey of 1,100 dog owners, 64% admitted their dog chased animals, while 39% said their dog didn't come back when called.

We have found attacks on livestock in Essex range from cases where the owners of properties neighbouring a farm have not secured their fences and allow dogs to roam unsupervised, to owners

walking dogs in rural areas off the lead around livestock.

We dealt with a particularly distressing case last November. Two dogs escaped a property next to a farm and began attacking sheep. Five were killed. Our officers arrived to find the dogs still attacking sheep – with no owner in sight. Regrettably, one of the dogs was completely out of control and the difficult decision was made to dispatch it humanely, to protect the sheep.

And in December, a dog escaped another property with poorly-maintained fences and injured several sheep nearby. Fortunately, none needed to be put down.

In such cases, our team investigates. We have specialist training and knowledge of rural crimes and understand the impact this type of incident can have on farmers and livestock owners.

Usually, they don't want the dog owner prosecuted. They simply want to ensure the dog will

never attack livestock again and that the cost of any vet's bills or replacement animals is covered.

We discuss all options with them, from prosecution through to a police caution or a community resolution. A community resolution is an alternative to court. The dog owner must admit fault and agree to abide by certain conditions, such as muzzling their dog, keeping it on a lead and avoiding livestock in fields. And they will often have to compensate the animals' owner for their losses or costs. This approach is very effective at preventing repeat attacks.

Our team also works proactively to reduce attacks. We use bikes to patrol country parks and areas where attacks have been reported to engage with dog owners. We provide advice and guidance and try to educate those who may not have grown up in a rural community.

The Government is taking this issue seriously. Measures from the proposed Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill will be taken forward individually as single-issue bills to strengthen existing laws under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953. They should expand protection to llamas, emus and donkeys and increase police powers to seize dogs and enter private premises.

All of this will be very welcome and will significantly increase our ability to tackle and investigate such crimes.

We want everyone to be able to enjoy our beautiful countryside but in a responsible way.

Sergeant Paul Brady Essex Police Rural Engagement Team (RET)



Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund – Layer Marney Church

Layer Marney church is a 500 year old Grade 1 listed church sitting in a rural part of the Colchester District.

It is the only public space available in the area for the community to come together. The PCC, Parish Committee, church and local community decided to pursue the project of adding facilities to the church building to allow for the creation of a Community Hub. This would keep the building in use, improve the accessible times of use and provide facilities to encourage the community to come together more often.

There were several phases to complete the Community Hub project, with the installation of lighting and toilet facilities the first to be tackled. Once they were completed the Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund (PJVF) was used to install a storage deck with loft ladder access above WC room, a kitchen sink area for events held for the village and additional long-term storage to free up space at ground level. The PJVF fund also supported the installation of power circuits and sockets in the main area including the meeting

area in the north aisle with a generator socket accessible for emergency use in the kitchen which was part of the village resilience planning package. To add rock wool insulation within the kitchen ceiling to reduce the height of the original room and insulation to the external door and secondary glazing on the north facing kitchen window to reduce heat loss. The final part of the project was to install radiators to the kitchen for heating, as this space was locally referred to as the coldest place in Essex!

The completion of the Community Hub is almost finished but even with those few areas left, the transformation of the space is evident. The new lighting system, which can be remotely controlled, allows for the building to be used not only on darker days but well into the afternoon and evening. The storage space and insulation have created a useful space which can help support activities in the building with much needed storage and reduce the energy costs which were considerable.

As well as providing for the religious needs of the Layer Marney parish, the church building now offers an inviting hub for lots of different activities for those different ages and needs within the community. They have lots of activities planned from sitting Pilates, Tai Chi and relaxation quiet times to shared social activities such as pizza supper club, pudding club, coffee mornings and a popup afternoon tea shop. They also plan educational activities including art classes, local history club, book club and a Natter Nature experience. It will also serve as a meeting place for all, allowing the community to come together and grow.

Gill Brown, the lead on the project said,

“ This has been a long and sometimes difficult project, Covid didn’t help either, but we all knew it would provide a much-needed space and thanks to support from the church, Essex County Council, the community and the Rural Community Council of Essex, we have finally realised it.”

Feeding the Nation

A new exhibition opened in May at Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome.



L-R: HM Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, Mrs. Jennifer Tolhurst, Mrs Eileen Webster, Robert McGowan, President of the Essex Agricultural Society

Unusually, it isn't focused on Great War flying. Instead, it is about how the place returned to agriculture to help feed the nation during the second conflict of 1939-45.

Guest curator, Stephen Nunn, welcomed VIP's; Mrs. Jennifer Tolhurst, Lord Lieutenant of Essex; the President of the Essex Agricultural Society, Mr. Robert McGowan; and RCCE Business Development Manager, Philip Wilson. If that wasn't impressive enough, the ribbon was cut by a real-life member of the Women's Land Army, sprightly 99-year-old, Mrs. Eileen Webster.

The story told is about how places like Stow Maries fed the nation. How resident farmer, Harry Turner, rose to the challenge to 'Dig for Victory' and helped save our people from starvation.

As the war clouds formed, farming methods were still stuck in the Victorian era, with out-dated, labour-intensive processes. Inter-war decline had resulted in 70% of Britain's food being imported from abroad. The Germans knew it and started targeting shipping. That seaborne blockade meant that farmers, like Harry Turner, had to embrace rapid change.

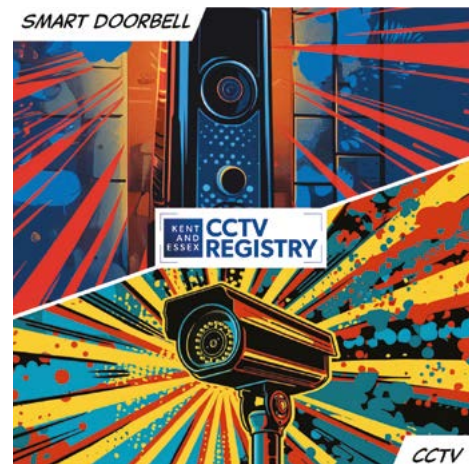
There was an immediate demand for more

land; a switch from livestock to arable farming; mechanisation and the use of a different type of workforce, including the Women's Land Army.

The County War Agricultural Committee undertook a survey, including of Stow Maries. Identified fallow lands were ploughed, trees felled, and improvements made in irrigation, drainage and pest control. Tractors became the new horsepower.

As a result, the makeshift agricultural army harvested bumper crops, leading to an undoubted Home Front Victory.

'Feeding the Nation' has been funded by the Middlewick Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund and the NFU Essex Charitable Trust. It will run for a year and more details can be found at: www.stowmaries.org.uk



Kent and Essex CCTV Registry

Do you have a doorbell camera or CCTV? Your CCTV could help us to solve real crimes.

Register your CCTV or doorbell camera today and play a crucial role in keeping your community safe. If your camera captures footage of a crime in your area, we will contact you. It takes just 60 seconds to register your home or business cameras.

Visit our website to learn more about how you can contribute to a safer community.

- We value your privacy; we will not have access to your cameras.
- We will only be able to view the location of registered cameras.
- We will look at locations only if there's been an incident nearby and footage could help us in gathering evidence.

What would happen if there was an incident nearby?

Should an incident occur where your video evidence may be of benefit to an investigation, an officer will contact you and then send you an email or text with a link for you to upload the relevant footage to our system.

At all times you stay in control of your CCTV and doorbell cameras and of any footage you provide to us.

Thank you for helping us keep Essex safe.

For more information or to register your cameras please visit our website: www.cctvregistrykentandessex.co.uk

RABI

Since it was founded in 1860, RABI has remained dedicated to supporting farming people. Just as agriculture has evolved, the charity's services have grown and adapted over time to uplift and assist those who work hard to bring food to our tables.



Today, RABI's aim is to build resilience by supporting the physical, financial and mental health of the farming community.

Financial Support

In the last 25 years alone, we have granted over £1/4 billion to farming families across England and Wales. These grants have played a vital role in easing financial burdens, helping individuals and families in times of unforeseen crisis, such as illness or injury, and assisting with housing support or adaptations. In recent years, further financial aid has been provided for families through our rapid-response cost-of-living grants, such as the annual Return to School grant and recent Winter Fuel campaign. These campaigns are designed to provide timely assistance when it's most needed.

Practical Support

In addition, RABI delivers practical assistance through our team of regional advisors. They provide one-to-one expert information, advice and guidance specific to farmers, including benefits guidance and other financial entitlements support. On

RABI's range of mental health services help the farming community to better navigate the uncertainties and pressures they may face.

average, we help the farming community access £500,000 of entitled benefits a year.

Emotional Support

RABI's range of mental health services help the farming community to better navigate the uncertainties and pressures they may face. Access to professional mental health counselling and our self-help online Click & Chat wellbeing platform means that farming people can access mental health support in a way that suits them, whether that's online or over the phone. Our accredited mental health training also aims to give people tools to normalise the conversation around mental health.

These services are available to everyone in the farming community, whether you're a farmer, member of a farming family, farm worker, retired or no longer working due to injury or other circumstances. Visit rabi.org.uk to learn more.

Essex RABI's Upcoming Events

Our Essex Committee has had a productive and rewarding year so far. In May, they represented RABI at the Essex Young Farmers Club Show, raising awareness of the vital support the charity offers farmers and their families.



Later that month, the committee hosted their annual Golf Day at Gosfield Lake, where guests enjoyed an 18-hole round of golf, a two-course carvery dinner and award presentations. This was followed by a well-attended Spring Lunch at the picturesque Spains Hall Estate, held with the kind permission of the Ruggles-Brise family.

Together, these events raised over £3,000 in aid of RABI's work. We extend our sincere thanks to all who attended and contributed – your support makes a real difference.

The following events are planned for the year ahead, and Essex RABI would be delighted to see you there:

- Sunday 28 September: Essex County Harvest Service at Chelmsford Cathedral.
- December: Essex Christmas Dinner. Details to be confirmed.

For the latest information on RABI events, please visit our website at www.rabi.org.uk/events

If you are passionate about supporting the farming community and would like to get involved, we encourage you to volunteer with us. You can view our current opportunities on our website or email us at volunteering@rabi.org.uk to find out more.



Tri Service Rural Community Officers

Les Davis
Maldon and the Dengie

Andrea Adams
Uttlesford

This role brings together residents and professionals to build on community strengths, to better understand need, to improve lives and to allow those who feel disconnected, to feel connected again.

Above L-R: Inspector Terry Jacobs, Andrea Adams, Les Davis and Sergeant Ben Felton

Background

In line with the PFCC's desire to improve collaboration between emergency services, the Tri Service Rural Community Officer role is a commitment to increase the number of people, especially those who are most vulnerable, that each service can reach and support.

Historically prevention activity has been delivered by individual Services, by working together it is intended that this role will reduce duplication of effort and make every contact count to improve the sense of safety and public wellbeing.

Focusing on priorities around prevention, the role provides an early intervention resource that is a visible uniformed presence.

Risks and Aims

Lonely individuals are at higher risk of fire and criminal activity, this risk is increased by living in a rural community

Reducing loneliness and isolation develops community resilience. This role brings together residents and professionals to

build on community strengths, to better understand need, to improve lives and to allow those who feel disconnected, to feel connected again.

Activities

- Home safety visits to provide Fraud prevention, home security and Fire Safety advice
- Selecta DNA property marking, high visibility engagements with Essex Police's Local and Rural Engagement Teams
- Joint rural patrols with local CSP members
- Slipper swap schemes and Falls Prevention events
- Silver Sunday and young person's Crucial Crew events
- Visits to Parent and Toddler groups
- Partnership 999 Days

A home safety visit and free smoke alarms can be requested by calling Essex Fire Service on 0300 303 0088

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

Kinder Essex

Amy Melton
Anna Wilson
Sarah Hawkes
Jane Owen
Kelly McKenzie
Catherine Venables
Tracey Crook
Christine Chester
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District

Service Coordinator – North
Service Coordinator – South
Basildon
Maldon
Castle Point
Tendring
(Physical Activity) Tendring
Uttlesford
Rochford
Colchester
Braintree
Brentwood
Chelmsford
Epping
Harlow
Essex Wellbeing Service
Volunteer Facilitator - Countywide

To email a member of the team please visit www.essexrcc.org.uk

Referral into service by Telephone
Referral into service by Email

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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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