

Rural priorities for 2010

Climate change Recognition
of rural deprivation Access to
services in rural areas Rural
economy – a focus on growth
Rural broadband provision
Affordable rural housing Addressing
fuel poverty Services for the ageing
population A future for rural young
people Support for community
buildings & assets Rural public &
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Introduction

In this special edition of *Action*, AirS identifies the issues that it considers are rural priorities for 2010. There are a total of 10 priorities with climate change also being included as an overarching issue which will influence the policy direction of the other priorities identified. Climate change therefore appears at the front of the document.

This is going to be a year of change and reconsideration of national policy priorities and it is therefore an opportune time to raise awareness about key rural issues and identify priorities for action through a series of recommendations.

AirS believes that it is important that rural issues are heard and acted upon by the next Government. It is also important however to raise awareness of these priorities with all policy formers and decision makers.

Please take the opportunity to read this document and in particular the recommendations that AirS makes under each heading.

If you have any comments, or if AirS can help you in any way, please contact:

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Climate change

Climate change is a global priority and impacts upon all of the following ten priorities

Climate change is a global phenomenon which is constantly in the news. The media coverage focuses largely on worldwide issues such as shrinking ice caps and glaciers, the threat to polar bears and extraordinary weather patterns, or on what individuals can do to reduce their own carbon footprint and adapt or reduce the effects of changing climatic conditions such as free light bulbs reducing energy consumption and use of renewables. Action in rural Sussex's (AirS) focus promotes activities that the local community can take together in order to further reduce the effects of, or help adapt to, climate change.

AirS believes that climate change is an overarching factor that should be taken into account to varying degrees within each of its rural priorities for 2010.

AirS' current activities

In 2009 AirS produced the 21st Century Village Toolkit, see illustration, which it is now developing and expanding further, with the University of Brighton, as a practical toolkit that all communities will be able to access and use. Watch this space!

AirS encourages all parish councils and village action plan groups to consider community initiatives that address climate change. There is a great deal of energy and enthusiasm within communities for addressing climate change locally and numerous examples where this is already happening. For example, Plumpton, Barcombe, Henfield and Harting have all been considering what they can do as a community to reduce energy consumption.

Dial Post, Cooksbridge and Barcombe provide just three examples of village hall committees that have actively sought to reduce the carbon

footprint of their community buildings. Other communities are looking into sustainable transport solutions, the use of renewable energy, improved recycling and more consumption of local food.

One of the drivers for many communities is the projected increased occurrence of changeable and extreme weather conditions; remember the snow, flooding, drought, hurricane type conditions that have visited us over the last decade. All of these examples illustrate the need for local preparation; more resilience to such conditions and more local self sufficiency.

Recommendations

AirS believes that each of its rural priorities needs to be viewed in the context of climate change and public sector investment should itself prioritise actions that address climate change issues.

- Rural communities are keen to reduce their carbon footprint and could be supported to do so through initiatives such as the Low Carbon Communities Challenge of the Department of Energy and Climate Change.
- AirS believes that all community led plans should include initiatives to reduce and adapt to climate change.
- AirS and the Sussex Association of Local Councils believe that parish and town councils should update their Emergency Plan so that it deals with the changing conditions brought about by climate change.



Above: AirS 21st Century Village illustration

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Rural priorities for 2010

We have identified the issues that we consider are rural priorities for 2010. These also provide an indication of the focus of Action in rural Sussex's (AirS') efforts during this year. AirS will be bringing these issues to the attention of the prospective parliamentary candidates in Sussex and generally raising awareness on these issues during the election period.

AirS invites others to use this information to have that same discussion with their prospective candidates on rural policy and delivery of services.

AirS believes that it is important that rural issues are heard and acted upon by the next Government and the election period provides an opportunity for the rural voice to be heard.

These priorities were identified at the AirS Conference in November, as well as through discussions internally and with partners and interest groups at a local and national level.

The priorities and a summary of AirS' recommendations, in no particular order, are as follows:

Rural priority 2010

Action in rural Sussex (AirS) summary of recommendations

See appropriate page for further detail

1 Recognition of rural deprivation

AirS believes that all public sector bodies should be aware of the 'Rural Share of Deprivation' approach and should undertake needs assessments on this basis to ensure equity of resource provision across all areas based on the numbers of people in need.

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2 Access to services in rural areas

AirS believes that:

- service planners must ensure that access to their services from rural areas is always considered and stated in emerging strategies
- working alongside and involving local communities can provide innovative and integrated solutions and can achieve the economies of scale required
- access to broadband in rural areas must not be allowed to fall further behind access in urban areas and that universality of broadband is particularly relevant.

See rural broadband recommendations.

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3 Rural economy – a focus on growth

AirS believes that rural business support in 2010 is important for overall economic growth within each County. The rural economy has as much potential as urban based businesses to help us out of the current recession. Small rural business growth has been one of the drivers of the South East economy in the last decade. Public sector support should focus on:

- developing support for home based businesses
- providing specialist business support for essential service sector businesses that are struggling in the current economic climate, including village shops, Post Offices and 'pubs'
- continuing support to small market towns across Sussex to help maintain their economic functions
- providing support to the Land-Based Sector particularly in addressing skills shortages and the need to attract a younger generation into the Sector
- making the vital links between schools and colleges and local rural businesses to help foster an interest in the local economy and local businesses amongst young people.

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4 Rural broadband provision

AirS believes that broadband is now as essential a public utility as water or electricity. The fundamental requirement is to swing the pendulum away from a cheap and accessible service solely in urban areas to one where income generated by the whole system is used to create a universally accessible and universally priced service.

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5 Affordable rural housing

AirS believes that the recommendations of the 2008 Mathew Taylor Review, *Living, Working Countryside* should be implemented in full and will continue to lobby central government to commit adequate resources to address this crucial rural issue.

We also support the National Housing Federation's campaign, Save Our Villages, which calls on local authorities to produce up to date assessments and action plans for rural affordable housing.

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6 Addressing fuel poverty

AirS believes that there is still a need to get the right information about the available government support, to all those in fuel poverty in rural areas. A long-term strategy must include regulatory and tax incentives to help communities and individuals develop more energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, including energy generation. This will have the dual effect of tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.

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7 Services for the ageing population

AirS believes that providing support services for older people in rural communities requires a partnership approach between different public agencies such as the NHS and local authorities, community support organisations and local community groups and organisations. Pilot projects are demonstrating that this does work. The focus must be on keeping people healthier and active for longer and achieving this support to local communities who can develop local activities and services should be a priority.

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8 A future for rural young people

AirS believes that there are a number of priorities for supporting rural young people. These are:

- providing additional support for those who are unemployed and not attending college or other training. AirS is particularly keen to work in partnership with the Public Sector, other agencies and rural employers to increase the opportunities for young people to work or train locally
- promoting initiatives that assist young people to remain in their own community and be involved in democratic processes locally
- assisting more parish and town councils to engage and involve young people in their development plans.

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9 Support for community buildings and assets

AirS believes that there should be a nationally available capital fund to support the maintenance, upkeep and renewal of rural community buildings. We join in with the call at a national level for changes to the VAT and Licensing Law for community buildings. We support the role of parish councils in precepting their community to improve and maintain these vital rural assets. The bureaucratic burden on volunteers is a deterrent and must be reduced if more local people are to be attracted to voluntary management committees.

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10 Rural public & community transport provision

AirS believes that increased use of public and community transport will only come with more regular, reliable, flexible and comfortable provision. Community transport providers, parish and town councils and support agencies such as AirS each have a key role in working in an integrated way with the Public Sector to ensure that needs are identified and local solutions are found to plug the gaps in provision. Funding for such community approaches must be consistent and long-term.

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A number of national rural organisations have developed similar lists. These include:

The Rural Coalition, a partnership between six national organisations which is campaigning for reforms that will create a 'strong, confident and sustainable countryside'. The organisations include Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the Local Government Association (LGA), the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). The Rural Coalition has produced a document, *The Future is Rural Too*, which outlines its philosophy and vision for rural areas.

The Rural Services Network (RSN), a group of over 250 public and private sector service providers, has published *The Rural Services Manifesto, 2010 and Beyond* also to influence the debate over the future of rural areas. The document calls on political parties to give a fair deal to those living in rural areas

and to recognise the difficulties rural people face accessing vital services.

Carnegie UK Trust, which has long championed the work of rural communities and has produced a report, *A Manifesto for Rural Communities, Inspiring Community Innovation*. Amongst other things, the report lists services that all communities should have access to, regardless of their geography. It is in rural areas that access to these services is most threatened.

The Country Landowners Association (CLA), which has produced a document called *Making the most of our Countryside – a manifesto for the rural economy*. It too outlines crucial issues that need to be addressed if the rural economy is going to reach its full potential.

These documents can be found on the AirS' website or on the individual organisation's website. AirS is joining with these organisations in making clear what its vision is for rural Sussex and is making achievable recommendations that will improve the quality of life for all in rural areas.

Recognition of rural deprivation

Please also see priorities:
2 4 5 6 7 10

Central government has increasingly focused over the past decade on using statistical evidence as the main means of identifying need and targeting resources. The justification for this approach is that datasets such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation allow a uniform comparison of the need in different areas to be established. Such data is then commonly used by central and local government to identify and prioritise the most disadvantaged 10% or 20% of areas so that they can receive special help.

A combination of this approach and the construction of the data invariably lead to the prioritisation of urban areas where deprivation is by its very nature concentrated. However, by focusing on these areas it is possible to lose sight of the fact that far greater numbers of disadvantaged people, often 75-80% of all disadvantaged people, may live in areas not viewed as being very deprived.

An alternative and fairer approach for identifying needs is called the Rural Share of Deprivation. This measures cumulative levels of need for areas defined as 'rural' and areas defined as 'urban' within a local authority or county. This is important because many small rural areas are unlikely to contain very high concentrations of disadvantage.

However, collectively they are likely to contain very significant numbers of disadvantaged people. Where disadvantage across rural areas has been aggregated together it is often significant and on a par with levels in many urban areas, as illustrated in the two graphs for West Sussex.

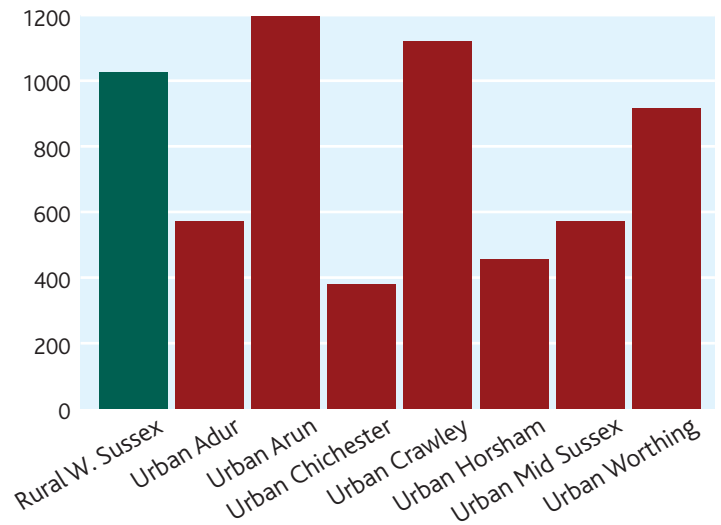
"Rural people should be treated with the same respect and lack of discrimination as any other minority group."
 Jeremy Leggett,
 CE's Blog

AirS' current activities
 AirS has provided different organisations and partnerships with a range of information about the rural share of disadvantage and has spoken at regional and local conferences on the subject in the last year.

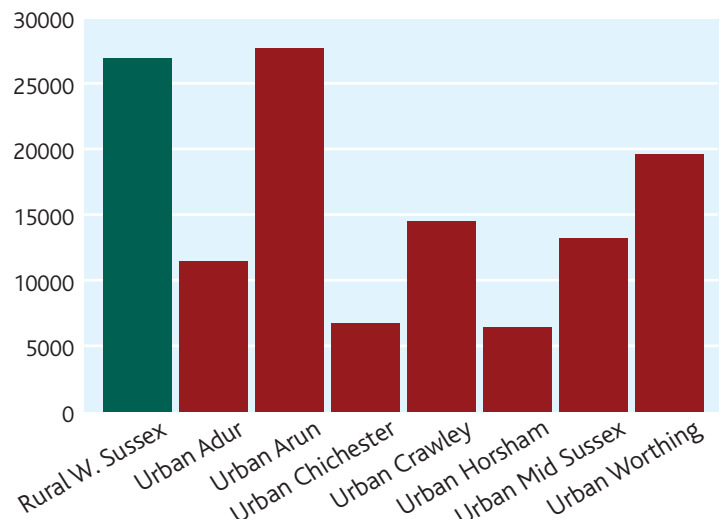
Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex (AirS) has utilised the 'Rural Share of Deprivation' concept to illustrate to decision makers at national, regional and local level the importance of developing holistic approaches to gathering evidence. We argue, and recommend, that all public sector bodies should be aware of this approach and undertake needs assessments on a similar basis to ensure equity of resource provision across all areas based on the numbers of people in need.

Jobseekers Allowance



People with long-term limiting illness



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Access to services in rural areas

Please also see priorities:



Above: Storrington Forge House Community Hub

Accessing services is a significant factor that affects the daily lives of many people living in rural areas. Whether it is travelling to hospital, getting advice on the telephone or seeking information on the internet, a wide range of barriers can prevent people from carrying out simple everyday tasks. Whilst many would accept that by living in the countryside, the ease with which they can access certain services and facilities is likely to be lower than those living in towns and cities, the experience of many people in rural areas is that this situation has become worse.

As both public and private sector services have increasingly been reduced or consolidated in order to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale, so they have tended to focus where they are most cost effective and this tends to be in urban centres. This process particularly affects those who are disadvantaged in other ways such as those on low incomes, those with disabilities and the elderly. Whilst mitigation for these changes tends to focus on the provision of outreach services or the use of technology such as web based services, the

effectiveness of these alternatives is not always fully assessed. Rural broadband coverage and speed is often very poor and can be comparatively costly for rural residents and organisations. In addition, those most affected by the reduction in fixed services may also be unable to deal with a move to web based services.

AirS' current activities

Action in rural Sussex works directly with service providers to assist them in planning their services. We have good links and

work with local communities and rural organisations that can often offer solutions. An example of this is Storrington in West Sussex. A need for some form of job searching service was identified and so an approach was made by AirS to Job Centre Plus who have been investigating ways to deliver their services in rural areas, thus increasing their reach into rural areas. As a result, Storrington Community Partnership will now host a Job Centre Plus mobile unit twice a month with support from AirS who will be providing help with CV writing and confidence building for anyone seeking to find new employment. The fusion of local knowledge and marketing, links to local employers and professional expertise could prove to be a successful way for providers such as Job Centre Plus to overcome the difficulties of achieving adequate uptake of their service.

The use of mobile facilities by multiple services can be attractive for rural provision, as seen by the use of Children and Families Centre vehicles by agencies as wide ranging as the Oral Health Service and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

By pooling resources, service providers can spread cost and

make a more attractive offer for customers. Community buildings are assets that can be put to greater use to provide a range of services. However, investment is needed to bring some of these buildings up to standard. AirS is involved in a number of village hall initiatives as well as the development of a redundant church building in Hurst Green as a community shop and youth provision and the redevelopment of an old forge in Slindon as a community shop and information point.

Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex believes and recommends that:

- service planners must ensure that access to their services from rural areas is always considered and stated in emerging strategies
- working alongside and involving local communities can provide innovative and integrated solutions and can achieve the economies of scale required
- improved broadband provision could assist in ensuring better services to rural areas and that there needs to be universality of pricing and availability to ensure that rural areas are not further disadvantaged.

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Rural economy – a focus on growth

Please also see priorities:

4 8 10

The rural economy has some distinctive and unique features that need to be recognised by economic and business support policies.

These are:

- 1 The Land-Based Sector, which although diminished in terms of employment and contribution to gross national product, is fundamental for food and produce supply and for the maintenance of the valued landscape. Over 50% of agricultural workers are now over the age of 50 and there is, therefore, a real need to attract young people into the industry in the next decade. There is already an existing skills shortage that needs to be addressed. The continual need to renew and review business opportunities as well as product prices and markets remains a key feature of the sector.
- 2 The Service Sector businesses within rural communities such as shops, Post Offices, banks, catering and hospitality, and health and care, which are not just important because of the employment that they provide, but also for community and social reasons. For example, the closure of the Village Shop or Post Office or 'Pub', has a direct and lasting impact on the viability and sustainability of the local community. Apart from the direct impact of fewer local jobs, closures also have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged and low income households.
- 3 Small businesses of less than ten employees, which are the norm in rural areas. A particular characteristic of small business growth in the rural areas in recent years has been the growth of home based businesses. 61% of home based businesses are rural, across a wide range of different business sectors. *"Home based businesses are rarely understood, recognised or supported by government and economic development agencies. They often operate 'under the radar', leaving them prone to isolation and unlikely to benefit from programmes designed to assist business growth."* Home based Business Manifesto – Enterprise Nation 2009.
- 4 Poor broadband service to rural areas, which is and will increasingly inhibit the growth of small businesses in rural areas. *See the broadband issue on opposite page.*
- 5 Unemployment amongst young people, which is a particular issue for 2010. For rural young people accessing job and training opportunities is often more difficult than for their urban equivalent.

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Overall the growth in small rural based businesses across many sectors has meant that in Sussex the rural areas have had a relatively healthy economic outlook. For this reason, the rural economy is likely to have as much impact on the recovery from the current recession as the urban areas of Sussex and rural businesses must be provided with the necessary support to ensure that they can realise this potential. This includes adequate business premises of various types as well as business support services.

AirS' current activities

AirS believes that a strong local economy is essential to the future of rural Sussex and has worked to support small businesses directly as well as lobby on behalf of rural business support with service providers. AirS in the past has provided specialist business support to rural shops, lobbied on behalf of the retention of rural Post Offices, promoted the development of local social enterprises and supported and promoted the development of local markets for local produce. AirS was instrumental in ensuring that European Union grant opportunities through the Leader Programme were available throughout both Counties.

With its partners, AirS is currently exploring how rural



Above: Lodsworth Larder Village Shop home based businesses can be better supported, providing advice to community shops and other social enterprises and providing specific support in small rural towns to enhance and develop the vitality of the local economy.

Recommendations

The rural economy has as much potential as urban based businesses to help pull the Country out of the current recession. Small rural business growth has been one of the drivers of the economy, especially in the South East in the last decade.

Action in rural Sussex believes that strong rural economic growth is essential for the future of rural areas. It recommends that:

- the recommendations of the Living, Working Countryside Report 2008 from the Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing remain relevant and should be addressed in full. This includes ensuring that the supply of premises is adequate to allow the growth of small businesses
- the strongest trend in recent years has been the growth of

Rural broadband provision

Please also see priorities:

1 2 3 8



Photographer: John Dominick © SDJC

home based businesses and addressing their needs must now be a priority

- government should revive its direct specialist business support and funding for village shops, 'pubs', Post Offices and other essential community services which continue to struggle to survive
- the effect of the recession, especially the number of shop and business closures in some of the market towns, is all too obvious. Continued government support to market towns is required if the important role of these local hubs is to be retained
- support to help land-based businesses diversify and adapt to new markets, maintain food and produce supplies and adapt to changing support mechanisms, remains an important and unique aspect of rural business support
- making the direct links between local schools and colleges and local businesses in rural areas is crucial if the younger generation are to be encouraged to fill the current skills gaps and ensure the future economic growth of rural Sussex.

Computer technology, and especially high speed interconnectivity, has brought dramatic change to almost every aspect of human activity and will continue so to do. Any individual, business or community that chooses not to be part of this changing world is also choosing to fall behind economically and to exclude themselves from wider society. For rural Sussex, however, this choice is being forced on many people by our poor and expensive access to broadband.

In urban areas of Sussex, such as Brighton, commercial broadband providers are competing to sell low cost 20Mbps, or more, broadband to every household in order to attract market share. In rural areas, the only provider of 'wired' broadband connectivity is BT. Many rural areas currently access, at best, 2Mbps with those near to the centre of major villages and small towns achieving 8Mbps. Many others, where the copper cables are long and frayed, can get nothing.

Businesses are making location decisions based on the availability of broadband, therefore risking damaging the rural economy. Young people have an inequity of access to schools systems as schools become increasingly reliant on connectivity. As government puts more and more information on line the democratic process itself becomes compromised.

The UK Government has chosen not to intervene through subsidy or regulation to ensure that broadband is rolled out equally to urban and rural areas. Instead, it has allowed telecoms providers to 'cherry pick' the urban places where profits can be made quickly. Other countries have successfully taken other approaches and, as a result, the UK now lags badly behind.

AirS' current activities

AirS have been actively campaigning on this issue for several years and has found many partners sympathetic to its view through the Rural Partnerships, the South East Rural Board and the Commission for Rural Communities. Whilst there may be some piecemeal, community led, initiatives that can help, AirS believes that comprehensive use of the Ofcom regulatory mechanisms is needed to make a real impact.

AirS will continue to campaign, but will also assist, wherever possible, local initiatives that might demonstrate to the Government or the Regulator why and how they need to take action in this area.

Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex believes that broadband is now as essential a public utility as water or electricity. The market to provide broadband has resulted in intense competition in urban areas with competition based on price and bundling of other telecoms products. Conversely there are no competitive forces driving down prices or improving access in rural areas. This is a market failure that requires intervention, but the precise mechanism used to intervene in it is less important than the determination to do so. The current 50p levy is hopelessly inadequate. It is recommended that the fundamental requirement is to swing the pendulum away from a cheap and accessible service solely in urban areas to one where income generated by the whole system is used to create a universally accessible and universally priced service.

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Affordable rural housing

Please also see priorities:

1 6 7 8 10

The chronic shortage of, and need for more, affordable housing in rural areas is now widely accepted and the case well rehearsed. Open market house price rises are highest in rural areas¹, average rural incomes are low and what was rented housing stock has been sold under 'right to buy' legislation. The result? In-migration of affluent commuters, young local people leave and the proportion of older people rises, leading to the break up of family networks and the loss of intergenerational support. Furthermore, key services, such as schools and shops, struggle to survive and the very sustainability of rural communities is under threat. A record 650 'pubs' and 400 shops closed in rural areas in 2009, while village schools continue to disappear from the rural landscape at a rate of one a month².

This is a pattern and profile which we are witnessing throughout rural England and Sussex is certainly no exception. As one local woman pleaded at a recent consultation event in Barcombe, East Sussex:

"This Village is dying, a lack of people living in the Village is killing off our services and community, ...I would like my children to stay and bring up their own family in the Village but if things stay as they are this dream will never happen. To the Parish Council and others, please

start listening to us. We want this Village to grow for us and future generations."

In this case the Parish Council and others did listen and 12 units of affordable housing for local people are currently being built on the edge of the Village. It is this kind of small scale, incremental growth that is desperately needed in rural Sussex.

AirS' current activities

Action in rural Sussex's rural housing enabling work is

currently underway in over 30 parishes across East and West Sussex with small developments of affordable housing for local people coming forward in the Districts of Rother, Lewes and Horsham this year. This work involves raising awareness of the issue, identifying housing needs through parish surveys and working alongside the Parish Council, Local Authority and specialist rural housing associations to identify and appraise sites and consult with the wider community.

Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex supports the recommendations of the 2008 Mathew Taylor Review, *Living, Working Countryside*, and will continue to lobby central and regional government to commit adequate resources to address this crucial issue for rural communities.

As Mathew Taylor MP points out: *"In many cases just a handful of well designed homes, kept affordable in perpetuity for*

local people, will make all the difference to the sustainability of a village and its services."

We also support the National Housing Federation's campaign, Save Our Villages, which calls on local authorities to produce up to date assessments and action plans for rural affordable housing. Rural communities can support one another through the sharing of good practice, particularly by those who have been involved in providing local needs housing. They can help themselves by raising the issue locally and encouraging those in need to register that need.

Footnotes

- 1 Homes in predominantly rural areas of the South East cost nearly 14 times local incomes on average, *Home Truths*, National Housing Federation 2009.
- 2 Figures researched by the National Housing Federation November 2009.

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Above: new housing scheme at Barcombe Right: affordable housing at West Dean, West Sussex

Addressing fuel poverty

Please also see priorities:

1 5 7

At a time when we are enduring the coldest winter in almost 30 years, fuel poverty is a very relevant and timely issue. There are currently real concerns about how some households will be able to cope in the cold and anxieties amongst individuals about keeping inadequate heating on for so long and the effect this will have on their bills. Fuel poverty results from a combination of poor heating and insulation standards, low household income and high energy prices. A household is deemed to be in fuel poverty if 10% or more of its annual income is spent on fuel or energy. Figures from the Department of Energy and Climate Change show up to 4.6 million households in England could be in fuel poverty in 2010 with a current estimate that some 1.1 million rural households are fuel poor. Figures for East Sussex identified that approximately 10% of households were in fuel poverty in 2006 which represents some 22,632 households according to National Energy Action.

Several characteristics impact on the scale of fuel poverty found in rural areas. These are:

- the extent of solid walled properties is much higher in rural areas
- more Warm Front Grants are delivered to urban areas than rural
- rural areas have lower average wage levels than urban areas
- fewer homes have mains gas and a corresponding dependency by many on oil which has increased significantly in price. One of the consequences of this reliance on oil, and also on coal, is high carbon emissions in rural areas.

The combination of low income and poor standards of heating and insulation is most prevalent amongst the elderly population where the problem may be further exacerbated by existing ill health. An increased call on NHS services is the inevitable result. Recent released figures

show that there were an estimated 36,700 excess winter deaths in England and Wales in 2008-09. The majority of these deaths occurred among those aged 75 and over. This is particularly significant across Sussex, as both Counties have high proportions of their populations aged 65 and over.

The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out the Government's objective of eradicating fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010 and for all households by 2016. Major progress in reducing fuel poverty since 1996 has been halted and reversed by drastic increases in gas and electricity prices. Since 2003, the average annual domestic dual fuel bill has increased by 114%. The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has reported a big rise in the number of people seeking help for their growing fuel bills with average fuel bills now at record levels, mainly because of the surge in wholesale gas prices in the past few years.



AirS' current activities

AirS primarily undertakes an awareness raising role, working with partners such as the Sussex Association of Local Councils (SALC), the District Councils, the Primary Care Trusts and the Healthy Homes Partnerships to provide information and advice to parish councils and 'front line' health and social care workers from both the Voluntary and Statutory Sectors. This information can then reach those in need in rural communities. We have run a number of workshops and training sessions to help people understand fuel poverty and its impact, how to identify those most in need and provide current up to date information about grants and support available. We have also produced, with SALC, *A Guide to Fuel Poverty for District and Parish Councils*. AirS is currently working with the Ouse Valley Partnership in a pioneering project to explore ways of introducing carbon saving measures, including local power generation using renewable energy sources, while

at the same time tackling fuel poverty issues.

Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex believes that there is still a need to get the right information about the available government support and initiatives to those individual households who are in fuel poverty in rural areas. A more joined up approach including the training of professionals or those in 'positions of trust' to support people to get this help needs to be a focus for activities locally. For the future, a more ambitious long-term strategy is required that includes a regulatory structure and tax incentives to help communities and individuals work together to develop more energy efficiency and renewable energy measures. For example, this could include solid wall and underfloor insulation and home or community level renewable energy generation which will have the dual effect of tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.

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Services for the ageing population

The increasing proportion of older people within the population of East and West Sussex is an issue of both current and future importance, particularly within rural communities. Both Counties have high numbers of people of pensionable age when compared to the regional and national average and this trend is predicted to continue at an increasing rate. For example, East Sussex currently has a quarter of its population over the age of 65 with approximately 12% of the population over 75 and 3.8% over 85. The County is predicted to experience a 60% increase in the numbers of those over 85, with the highest rates predicted to occur in rural areas. The figures are similar in West Sussex.

This change in the demography will have a significant impact on both individuals and communities alike. Many older people receive low incomes as well as experiencing health, transport and housing problems. These older people are more likely to become isolated and lonely as they are less able to participate in community activities. Enabling older people to remain healthy, independent and active and to live locally is a priority for many rural residents and service providers. It does present certain challenges in rural areas because of the need to provide locally accessible services. The provision of publically funded care support services will cost more to provide across a rural area than for the same number of people in an urban area. While it is not feasible or affordable for every village to have specialist older people's housing, it is likely that, with a little support, local volunteers can and will provide many of the social and community support required, such as lunch clubs, community

support networks and clubs, voluntary car schemes etc.

In both Counties the needs of rural older people for support services should be met regardless of where people live. The cost of providing this is likely to increase as the numbers rise and the danger is that some services are cut back to the detriment of rural areas. Key issues of concern for older people are access to schemes that help them to keep healthy and active, health and hospital services, access to local shops, affordable, warm and appropriate housing, *see fuel poverty on page 9*, and the ability to socialise and participate in community activities and events. Targeted and appropriate support within the local community can help particularly in preventing a deterioration in the mental and physical health of individuals through the development of strong community based support services, operating from the Village Hall or provided locally, that will enable older people to continue to socialise, remain healthy and to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.



Health services at North Mundham Hall

AirS' current activities

Through its Village Care Programme covering Wealden, Lewes and Rother and the Chichester Project including the Isolation Action Group and the West Sussex Pathfinder Programme, AirS works in partnership with the Primary Care Trusts, the County and District Councils and other community and voluntary sector organisations to support older people in rural areas. In Lewes and Wealden Districts, AirS has a joint programme with the Alzheimer's Society focusing on the needs of carers and those with dementia. Within each of the projects, AirS supports the development of a range of activities to promote and develop health and well-being, independence and choice. AirS offers support and advice to communities and activists to assess their community's health and well-being needs and find local achievable solutions. Through this programme, AirS also provide rural strategic direction through Local Strategic

Please also see priorities:



and Health Improvement Partnerships and other networks and forums.

Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex knows that providing support services for older people in rural communities will be a growing need over the next decade. In particular there will be an increase in the number of people who are over the age of 75. Current innovative community support programmes have indicated that a partnership approach between different public agencies such as the NHS and local authorities, community support organisations such as AirS, Age Concern etc and local community groups and organisations is the only way forward in rural areas. In 2010 this approach needs to be developed and replicated. In particular, community groups and organisations must receive support and funding to help them to provide services locally. They can provide services and activities that keep people healthier and active for longer, as well as work alongside professional health and adult care workers to provide local additional support where it is needed. In addition, a full exploration of social enterprise solutions that could bring local employment should be evaluated as part of these innovative approaches.

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A future for rural young people

Young people from rural Sussex at an EDGE national event



The needs and the issues around young people are often raised within rural communities. Some of these focus on the 'problems' such as anti-social behaviour, minor vandalism and drug or health issues and how these can be solved. Increasingly it is acknowledged that improved access to services, information and facilities for rural young people and their families is part of the solution to these problems. From an early age, provision of local services is an issue for young people. It starts with the availability of rural childcare, followed by the difficulties of fully participating in after school activities and clubs, when in full-time education, because the school bus leaves at a fixed time. Within their own community there are often difficulties in providing local youth clubs or facilities because there isn't the building or the space or the transport and there are often problems in recruiting volunteers locally. Organised team sports seem to fair well, but less formal approaches do struggle to get established and survive.

Once the prospect of college looms then the issues revolve around the cost, reliability and availability of transport to college and back. For some families the cost can be prohibitive or just too difficult to organise. It is the same when considering job and career prospects. The area of search is restricted by how a young person can get to and from the job reliably, safely and affordably. At the same time, parents, who do require support,

for whatever reason, often have greater difficulty in accessing that information, guidance or support.

The search for jobs, training and education opportunities often entails looking beyond their community, frequently to the larger towns. In addition, finding an affordable rural home is an added and often insurmountable problem for many young people as they strive to become independent.

The result is that young people are leaving the rural areas for urban areas. Many want to go. However, many others do not want to leave their family and the Village where they have grown up. On top of this, in this recession we are experiencing the highest level of youth unemployment since records were first kept. Rural young people are seriously disadvantaged in this current climate. There is very little emphasis from the publically funded agencies who are helping young people into the job market, in finding them local jobs. Most of the apprenticeship opportunities and contacts with employers by these agencies are with the larger urban based employers. Providing a rural brokerage and support for rural employers to get engaged with such initiatives could help to solve some of the issues faced by rural young people.

AirS' current activities

AirS provides support to communities wishing to establish youth facilities and activities in East Sussex and offers rural family support across the County through its Children's Outreach and Parents Extended Support Service (COPES), which is funded by East Sussex Children's Trust. These services are by no means universal across both Counties. In West Sussex, support for the Rural Purple Bus for young people has been longstanding and, in addition, AirS offers a

Please also see priorities:

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mobile youth service focusing on health and well-being issues.

Much of the current local produce work within AirS focuses on working with schools, local producers and caterers to improve children's knowledge of local food and help with their healthy cooking skills.

AirS is also currently involved with four communities exploring with young people and the Parish Council there how young people can get more involved with local democratic processes. The idea is to develop a model that other parishes can use.

Recommendations

AirS believes that there are a number of priorities for supporting rural young people. These are:

- providing additional support for those who are unemployed and not attending college or other training. AirS is particularly keen to work in partnership with the Public Sector, other agencies and rural employers to increase the opportunities for young people to work or train locally
- promoting initiatives that assist young people to remain in their own community and be involved in democratic processes locally
- assisting more parish and town councils to engage and involve young people in their development plans.

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Support for community buildings and assets

Please also see priorities:

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Rural community buildings come in all shapes, ages and sizes. However, one thing common to them all is that they are essential for the vitality and vibrancy of community life. In most cases we are talking about a village hall, but we could also be talking about a community owned shop, the church hall, a community owned 'pub', a converted school building or classroom, or community office. In many Sussex villages there is only one meeting place. If this closes or deteriorates to the point that it can no longer be used, the community itself begins to die. People are forced to go elsewhere for clubs, organisations and services and the loss of a local meeting place means that vulnerable people become increasingly isolated and invisible. Even in these days of instant communications, community buildings remain essential for social and community networking as well as for the delivery of local services and facilities.



Public Information Day at North Mundham Hall

The work to keep these buildings functioning and in a state of good repair often falls to a few individuals such as the Trustees or management committee who have responsibility for the running and management of the facility. These volunteers take on this role in an increasingly complex legislative and regulatory framework. Add to these the volunteers who run organisations and clubs from the building or who help run the community shop, and the number of local people providing vital services rises.

The dominant issues for these committees are the upkeep and maintenance of the building, the increasing burden of complex legislation and bureaucracy and attracting new volunteers to help in the managing of the buildings.

Many rural residents do not necessarily fully understand or appreciate the role that a few are undertaking on behalf of the whole community. More

volunteers are needed to assist in this task but also more support is needed from local residents, either directly by encouraging more to come forward, or through the Parish Council and the precept by taking some of the fundraising burden away from those individuals.

AirS' current activities

AirS provides information, support and advice to village hall, community building and community shop management committees.

In the last nine months AirS has launched its Heart of the Village Campaign that aims to raise awareness about the issues faced by those who are managing these local facilities. AirS has also organised a petition to the Prime Minister calling for a dedicated capital fund for the maintenance and renewal and replacement of rural community buildings.

Recommendations

A community meeting place is at the heart of the community and essential to maintain the vitality and vibrancy of rural communities. Those running these facilities have five main priority needs for 2010:

- 1 Consistent and reliable funding for capital improvements. Investment by government in keeping these assets well maintained will bring many community benefits. The removal of VAT requirements would enable many more developments and improvements to take place.
- 2 Reducing the bureaucratic burden and red tape that has developed around operating community facilities so enabling volunteers to concentrate on operational rather than legislative issues.
- 3 Practical support and advice to those running and managing these facilities. The AirS' Community Buildings Advice Service is well regarded and demand currently exceeds supply and yet there is a real danger that local authority support for the service will be cut back in the next few years. Communities do need to help ensure that this does not happen.
- 4 The recruitment of more volunteers to help run community buildings is essential.
- 5 The encouragement of more parish or town councils to raise funds through the precept to fully support the building and the work of the community building committees.

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Rural public and community transport provision

Please also see priorities:



Image courtesy of Battle Area Community Transport



Transport is one of the key issues for rural communities and is raised in almost every parish plan. It also affects so many other aspects of life such as the inability to travel, the cost of travel, the time taken to travel because of sparsity of services which are all issues faced by those living in rural areas. Journeys made may be for work, education, pleasure or undertaking tasks such as the school run, shopping or visiting the doctor or hospital. For most people these journeys are undertaken in private cars. We know that the levels of car ownership have increased in rural areas but many do view their car as a costly but essential necessity, often due to the lack of transport alternatives. However, for a significant minority who do not have access to a car, there remains a need for public or community transport provision. These include non-drivers, older people, young people, those with disabilities and those on low incomes. In many cases the community has stepped in with voluntary car schemes or community bus provision, but these are often viewed as specialist services for specific groups rather than for everyone. Limited transport options can lead to isolation and potentially significant deterioration in the quality of life of individuals, particularly the elderly.

The fact that the majority of rural dwellers do have their own car means that the pool of people requiring public or alternative transport is often relatively small and widely distributed. For public transport providers this means that the

cost of operation per passenger is much higher in rural areas, often to the point where they are not economically viable or cannot justify a subsidy. There is, therefore, an increased reliance on community organisations coming forward to plug the gaps.

AirS' current activities

Action in rural Sussex is working with transport providers, local authorities, service providers and communities to develop appropriate transport provision across rural Sussex.

AirS is working in partnership with East Sussex County Council to identify rural community transport needs in nine communities in the County and will be facilitating a number of public meetings in rural East Sussex over the next 18 months, directly listening and recording exactly what rural communities need in regards to community transport and, importantly, what community transport initiatives are likely to be sustainable in each community.

Recommendations

Action in rural Sussex believes that increased use of public transport will only come with more regular, reliable, flexible and comfortable provision. At the same time community transport has an increasing role to play in rural areas to plug the gaps in provision and to provide the very local services. This requires consistent and long-term support from government. AirS believes that parish and town councils could play a key role in promoting existing provision and in determining the type and level of need in their community. Closer and more integrated transport planning should be undertaken by public, private and voluntary sector providers to ensure that appropriate transport solutions are developed and delivered in rural areas.

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Action in rural Sussex will be providing much more information about these priorities over the coming months as it develops these themes and the key messages.

Please visit our website regularly for updates and for the opportunity to comment if you wish.

For further information please contact
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Action in rural Sussex

AirS has four aims that are the basis of its work

- 1 Reduce the incidence and impact of disadvantage and poverty** on people living in rural areas.
- 2 Increase the capacity of rural communities to manage change** for the benefit of all their members.
- 3 Inform and amplify the voices of rural communities** to influence public policy.
- 4 Support partnership initiatives** in pursuit of the first three aims.

Our vision for rural Sussex

“That Sussex is a place where an **inclusive active community life** is valued equally alongside **economic success** and **environmental protection.**”

Contact us

To find out more about Action in rural Sussex and our rural priorities for 2010, please contact:

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