

## **News Release**

**22nd April 2010**

### **Action in rural Sussex identifies 10 rural priorities for an incoming government**

Action in Rural Sussex (**AirS**) has identified 10 Rural Policy Priorities for 2010 and has now sent details of these, plus its own recommendations about tackling these priorities, to the Sussex parliamentary candidates in the forthcoming general election on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

The priorities cover those areas where AirS feels there could be some danger of the needs of rural areas being forgotten or overlooked or where there is an aspect of the rural dimension of the issue that requires particular attention. At a time when all public sector services are under review, AirS wants to ensure that the rural voice is heard and these rural priorities in particular are understood by policy and decision makers alike.

The rural priorities are :-

- 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 and assets
- Rural public and community transport

In addition AirS has identified climate change as an overarching issue that provides some of the context for future action and policy decisions.

Said Teresa Gittins, AirS' Head of Strategy and Communications

“AirS has consulted with its members and with rural communities in general and these are the priorities that have been identified. All too often rural areas and those living in them are stereotyped as wealthy and privileged. This is quite clearly not the case and many people living in rural areas face real hardship and disadvantage. This is particularly the case if you are young or old. These are the people who face real barriers when it comes to accessing services and many of the named priorities identified relate to their particular needs. There is much to be celebrated about living in a rural community for individuals and businesses alike, not least the sense of community and local natural environment. However this does tend to mask the fact that disadvantaged people live in rural areas and most probably find life more difficult because of that.

“There are also some services which are just not provided for on an equal footing with nearby towns and cities - a prime example is access to good broadband services. This is now as crucial as electricity and other utility services for so many individuals, organisations and businesses, but the current market does not provide equal services in rural areas. It would be all too easy for this fact to be forgotten in the rush to get better and better services in urban areas.

“The rural economy has the potential to take the lead out of the recession, especially with the growth of home-based businesses in the region. This will not be the case if these businesses are not supported or if broadband services are inadequate for present day business transactions and activities.

“All of these priorities are essential for the future of rural areas in both social and economic terms. We want to bring all of them to the attention of those standing in the forthcoming election and other decision makers and make sure that rural areas are taken into consideration when new policies are being developed”.

### **Ends**

Note to Editors: A full copy of **AirS** Rural Priorities 2010 publication is attached to the email.

**Action in Rural Sussex** began life in 1931 as Sussex Rural Community Council, a registered charity, and has served rural communities ever since. It changed its name in 2002. The role of Action in rural Sussex is to identify problems and to respond to the needs of rural communities - providing practical help and supporting villages in Sussex to remain vibrant living and working places. AirS' agenda includes supporting communities to develop local action plans, distributing valuable grants for rural projects, developing innovative schemes for young people and campaigning on a range of key issues from affordable housing to rural transport.

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