

Action

The newsletter of
Action in rural Sussex
Issue N° 2
Winter 2006



Above: Chef Robin van Crefeld is a big hit with his healthy juices
See page 6 for more information on Local Food Action Plans

Plus ça change...

Jeremy Leggett, Chief Executive

This edition of *Action* starts with an explanation and a bit of an apology. Let's get the apology over with first. The aim this time was to give our supporters a clear explanation of changes and developments that will have an impact on rural communities in Sussex in 2006. It is still a worthy ambition but you will have to forgive us if we fail, so complex and dynamic has the world become.

During the early part of the year both East Sussex and West Sussex, led by the County Councils and the County Strategic Partnerships, are hoping to complete negotiations with Government on Local Area Agreements (LAAs). These are complex documents that aim to draw together a number of the key priorities for the Counties and, crucially, agree these priorities with central

government departments. An important part of this approach is the explicit involvement by a wide range of public bodies and other local organisations whose priorities are often set directly by Government. Action in rural Sussex (AirS) has worked closely with the Counties to ensure that issues of concern to rural communities are included in these County Local Area Agreements. In particular we have pressed strongly for both Counties to include a priority for more rural communities to be served by Quality Town and

Parish Councils. If this priority is included it will help us raise the status of Town and Parish

"We would welcome feedback from those we work with across Sussex"

Councils and demonstrate the value to rural communities of this most local form of government. Armed with this kite mark, Local Councils will be able to take on more, and in turn be more accountable to their local community.

One of the important elements of being a Quality Council is taking a systematic approach to looking at local needs and helping the community to find local solutions. This involves linking closely with District and County

Continued overleaf

In this edition...

Details of the new programmes funded by DEFRA – let us know your opinions on this and your views about the newsletter and what it should include. Also...



GRANT UPDATES VILLAGE HALLS NEW PROJECTS

In the next edition...

The next newsletter will be a bumper edition to mark the Action in rural Sussex 75th Anniversary – and our presence at the South of England Show as part of those celebrations

THE THEMES FOR THE NEXT FOUR EDITIONS OF THE NEWSLETTER ARE:

SPRING: Inclusive communities

SUMMER: Rural Housing

AUTUMN: Volunteering, Community Activists

WINTER: Parish Councils & Local Governance

based Community Strategies. Sussex has much to be proud of for the work that has been done to achieve this, especially in Districts such as Rother and Wealden where very strong formal links have been created between local Village Action Plans and District Community Strategies. AirS has sought to ensure that these priorities have also been translated, where possible into the Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

When the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asked us to draw up priorities for their Rural Social and Community Programme in both East Sussex and West Sussex, the LAAs and the Local Community Strategies were an obvious place to start. As a result we consulted 200 of our members and partners last November and from this produced two County plans for DEFRA. The priorities for these plans reflect existing priorities and include:

- affordable rural housing,
- support for implementation of Village Action Plans,
- support for Parish Councils becoming Quality Councils,
- support scheme and grant fund to promote social inclusion,
- additional support for Community Buildings in villages,
- access to healthy and local food for rural communities.

AirS will be managing the delivery of this programme of additional support over the next two years and welcome feedback from those we work

with across Sussex. We will be using *Action* as one way of keeping people up to date with these initiatives and welcome your views – see page 3.

Change is in the air at a regional level as well. During 2006 we will see the final touches being made to the South East Plan.

“Many of the most important issues that concern rural communities remain stubbornly stuck in the ‘too difficult’ tray”

There will be a formal consultation in the Spring/Summer by Government. When this consultation is complete, Government will organise an Examination in Public into the Plan.

SEEDA is in the process of drawing up a new Regional Economic Strategy and, judging by the consultation documents, there is a good way to go if the interests of the rural economy are to find their proper place within it. In Sussex SEEDA still sees the County Economic Partnerships as their key partners in delivering the region's Economic Strategy. We believe that the only way to achieve sustained, and sustainable, economic growth is by engaging the whole community in this on a long term basis. We must beware of quick fixes dressed up as the inevitable 'early wins' so

beloved of those who are responsible for economic development.

If you have got this far, a question may be growing in your mind. Is anyone co-ordinating all of this, and especially for its impact on rural areas? The answer is both yes and no. The Government Office of the South East (GOSE) is responsible for co-ordination and has been developing a framework that should provide co-ordination for all rural policies in the region. In both East Sussex and West Sussex we are working with other partners, especially the County Councils to do the same.

As *Action* goes to press, the prospect of another period

of local government re-organisation appears like the light of an oncoming train in the tunnel.

For all this frantic structural change, some things remain the same. Many of the most important issues that concern rural communities remain stubbornly stuck in the 'too difficult' tray. These include affordable housing, capital funding for community buildings, increasing pressure on a diminishing number of active local volunteers and access to basic services for rural communities. During 2006 forget the processes and structures, instead make judgements on how these key issues are addressed in the year.

Action in rural Sussex AGM: November 2005

The Action in rural Sussex AGM, held jointly with the Sussex Association of Local Councils (SALC), attracted more than 200 people. It focused on the identification of rural issues to inform new strategies and programmes being developed within the two Counties (the Local Area Agreements and the Rural Social and Community Programme (see opposite page). Lively table discussions resulted in the identification of rural issues:

- the provision for and involvement of children and young people,
- provision for older people and the delivery of health and social care in rural communities,
- helping people and places to feel safer,
- affordable housing for local people,
- the need to retain and develop rural facilities and services including village shops, village halls, the use of school sites,
- maintaining local employment and developing new skills to meet new needs,
- providing accessible and sustainable transport,
- developing ways in which rural communities can work more closely with the statutory sector in the planning stages of new programmes.

New Rural Programmes for East and West Sussex

The Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is making approximately £120,000 available in each County from 1 April for a range of projects that will support rural communities. Action in rural Sussex (AirS) will be responsible for managing the programme and a range of organisations will be involved in delivery including locally based voluntary and community organisations. The components of the programme are described below.

Parish Council Support and Development



The Sussex Association of Local Councils (SALC) will be working with AirS to raise the profile of Parish and Town Councils and the role of Councillors in the run up to the 2007 Elections.

The programme will focus on encouraging as many people from as wide a background as possible to take an interest and stand for the local council elections in May 2007. The programme will provide support to individual councils to undertake this work within their own communities. After the elections the programme will provide support to newly elected councils and councillors.

Contact Trevor Leggo: 01273 476342

Parish Action Plans

AirS working with SALC, the District Councils and Local Strategic Partnerships will be providing specific support to local communities to implement their local Action Plans. This programme builds on the current Action Plans Support that has concentrated over the last two years on producing Local Action Plans. These now need to be turned into real 'action' within each community. AirS' officers will provide the 'know-how' and practical support.

Contact Ruth Goldstone: 01273 405458

Social Inclusion Support and Grant Fund

AirS will be co-ordinating a range of initiatives that will encourage groups and individuals who don't usually get involved within the community to do so. In particular it will provide expert advice and support that has hitherto been difficult to provide in rural areas (for example to minority groups, young people, older people etc). The grant fund will allow groups to 'buy in' that expertise.

Contact Pat Buesnel: 01273 405441

Rural Housing Enabling

Affordable social housing – providing local homes for local people – is a key issue facing all communities. AirS is able to provide an independent source of advice and assistance to parish councils and others wishing to address their own locally identified needs. Understanding housing and planning issues and acting as a crucial link between all of the agencies involved is a role that has made a difference in developing small housing sites in rural communities.

Contact Teresa Gittins: 01273 405442

Building a sustainable food system

Access to local produce is important to rural communities but is not always possible. A focus on diet, cooking skills and the quality of the food that we eat has become a priority. These key issues are combined in a programme to develop an interest in sourcing local produce and ensuring it is translated into a healthy diet. Support will be provided to groups and organisations to develop local food action plans and to celebrate our food culture through events and activities. This builds on existing projects like the school orchard and cookery programmes, food festivals, farmers markets etc.

Contact Anne Marie Bur: 01273 405445

Increased service delivery from village halls and community buildings

This will provide additional resources to the current village halls advice service to assist with the development of new public services from village halls and rural community buildings. Assistance to participating hall committees to take on these new roles and working with public services to encourage wider rural services will be the main focus.

Contact Gina Flanders: 01273 405451

Let us know what you think

Are these the right projects for rural Sussex?

Are there others that we should also be seeking funding for and what are these?

Are there priorities that aren't included?

Do you want to be involved with any of these? – let us know by filling in the short feedback form.



Stedham Memorial Hall re-opens after five years of fundraising

The re-opening of Stedham Memorial Hall in October 2005 was the result of sheer determination by the hall committee. It had taken five years to raise the funds for the refurbishment of the wooden hall, which had only one toilet, no proper kitchen and woodworm. The hall was originally built as a rifle range in 1920 and given to the village in 1949 as a Memorial to those who died in the two world wars.

This committee faced setback after setback in raising the £175,000 needed to refurbish and re-equip the hall. The hall was fairly well used, especially given its condition, yet application after application for funding failed – The Countryside Agency Vital Villages and Carnegie Trust programmes suddenly closed, the local landfill operator closed, the Community Fund advised them not even to apply.

Nevertheless the committee carried on fundraising, raising a staggering £40,000 from a village of only 600 people through a programme of fun activities. Chichester District Council played an important part, offering their maximum grant of £25,000 early on, which gave the committee a much needed boost in the face of other disappointments and helped bring other funders on board. Stedham Parish Council made a big commitment, with a grant of £40,000 funded through a loan from the Public Works Loan Board. Yet there was still a shortfall and nowhere else to turn to.

The turning point came when DEFRA's Rural Enterprise Scheme offered a grant of £48,000, the first RES grant for a village hall in Sussex. Efforts to find a way round a £25,000 VAT bill on the work proved fruitless so the committee still faced a shortfall when building work began. A loan from the Countryside Agency's Village Halls Loan Fund enabled work to go ahead but it was a relief when grants from Awards for All and other funders met the gap.

The refurbishment has been sympathetically designed by architect Roger Hill and the new Holbrook Room was sponsored by the widow of First World War hero Commander Holbrook.

£100,000 GOSE ChangeUp Fund helps twenty halls

The award of £100,000 to AirS by the Government Office of the South East's ChangeUp programme means 20 village and church halls in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove are set to become 'fit for purpose'. The aim of the Fund was to allow expansion or retention of services which benefit local people and improve sustainability from income generation.

The timetable for allocating the fund, announced late September, was very short as projects assisted had to be completed by February 2006, (in exceptional cases, May). Nevertheless there were 26 full applications, for double the funds available. After careful assessment 20 were awarded grants, almost all for essential work such as replacement of leaking roofs, replacement heating, refurbishment of old toilets and kitchens and provision of facilities for disabled people, to comply with the DDA. Only four of the 71 major capital projects known to be seeking funding could be assisted, owing to the short timescale, but several grants were made to keep halls on this list open while they seek funding to rebuild.

We are very grateful to GOSE for the funding – and to the experienced village hall volunteers: David Robins (Bolney), Warren Rainforth (Groombridge) and Mary Howse (Beckley) from the Sussex Village Halls Advisory Group and Liv Singh (The Trust for Developing Communities), who formed the assessment panel and worked with AirS village hall advisers Gina Flanders and Louise Beaton. Without them we could not have helped all these projects in the timetable.

Big Lottery Fund announces community buildings programme

The Big Lottery Fund will be making £50 million available over three years for community building projects across England. The Fund is due to be launched in June 2006. Further details will be given in AirS quarterly mailings to member halls when available.

This is welcome news for those communities in Sussex planning major capital projects but demand is expected to be strong, from urban and rural areas. AirS has alerted local authorities in East and West Sussex of the need to budget for partnership funding for applicants, otherwise there is a risk that Sussex could lose this funding to other parts of the country.

Awards for All, the joint lottery distributors small grants scheme, will be offering grants up to £10,000 from 1 April 2006.



Grants Team Update

In December five groups were awarded Sport Relief grants with extra Comic Relief money for the Brighton & Hove area.

These were:

- **Hove YMCA:** for a female sports programme, development of Stoneham Park Football Club and Friday afternoon sports sessions
- **The Young Carers Project:** for a Saturday club for young people
- **SPIN (Single Parents Information Network):** for subsidised or free activities for single parents to include childcare,
- **Adventure Unlimited:** for a 10 week programme of outdoor activities for young people at risk of exclusion
- **Whitehawk fitness fun group:** to run an activity morning for women.

There have also been many successful Local Network Fund applicants across Sussex, these are all listed on the website www.ruralsussex.org.uk after each panel meeting.

Make decisions that make a difference!

If you are experienced in working with community projects for children and young people, have some spare time to share with like-minded colleagues, and want to expand your understanding of funding, then join our Grant Assessment Panel!

The Grant Making Team within Action in rural Sussex is recruiting more voluntary panel members for both East and West Sussex.

If you are interested in any of the grants we administer or in being on the panel please contact Helen or Sophie on 01273 405452.



Reaching Communities: £100 million programme of funding for communities launched by Big Lottery Fund

The programme provides up to £500,000 for individual projects. Sarah Arnold, the Fund's regional development officer says it is a great opportunity for all organisations and groups who have ideas about how they can benefit from Lottery funding, and that it's about communities finding their own solutions to local issues.

The new Reaching Communities programme was developed following extensive public consultation which recognised a strong demand for a lightly prescribed, demand-led funding programme that allowed communities to bring real improvements to the lives of those most in need. The programme is largely aimed at benefiting the work of voluntary and community organisations.

Under Reaching Communities, the Big Lottery Fund will give out grants of up to £500,000 for projects that:

- offer people better chances in life, including being able to get better access to training and development to improve their life skills,
- build strong communities, with more active citizens, working together to tackle their problems,
- develop improved rural and urban environments, which communities are better able to access and enjoy, and
- create healthier and more active people and communities.

The maximum length of funding under this programme will be five years to allow projects more time to develop and become sustainable.

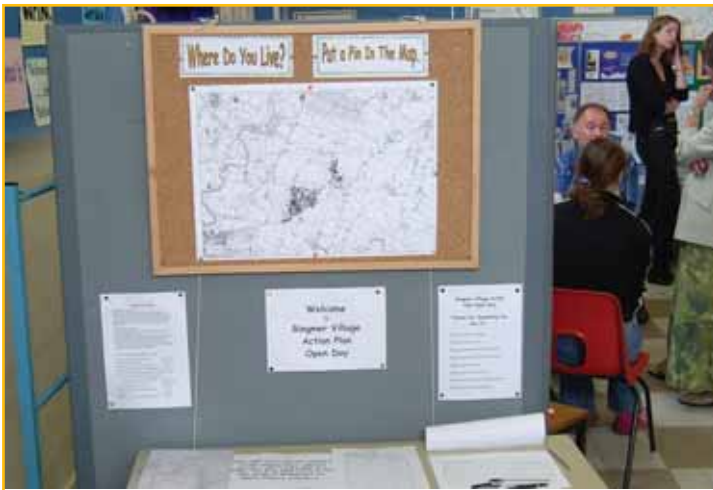
A new streamlined application process is in place allowing applicants to complete an outline proposal, providing brief information on the project, which will receive initial feedback within 15 working days. After this they can be asked to submit a full application form or signposted to another BIG programme which might be more appropriate for their proposals.

The Big Lottery Fund is launching a raft of programmes which will benefit communities across the UK. Reaching Communities is among the first to open for business. Other new and new-look programmes will include: Awards for All, the Young People's Fund, Community Buildings, Children's Play, Environmental, Advice Services and the People's Millions.



For more information see www.biglotteryfund.org.uk or call the BIG Advice Line on 0845 410200.

New projects



The Lewes Rapid Action Planning (RAP) Project – helping the smaller parishes do parish plans

Parish and Village Action Planning in Sussex has been particularly successful over the past few years with a good many parishes now completing a Local Action Plan.

However, there has been a tendency for the smaller parishes not to get involved because of a lack of resources or people or because they feel that the actions are all known about within the community anyway!

The Lewes Rapid Action Planning Project offers support and guidance to these smaller Parishes on techniques for gathering people's views and creating a Parish Action Plan which is tailored to their resources and community.

'Rapid' techniques – such as using 'comments boards' or maps at a summer fete, or holding an open morning and asking residents to come along and prioritise ideas for inclusion in the final action plan – can help to keep the timescale of creating an action plan shorter, and it also reduces the workload.

Eight Parishes have now attended a meeting to discuss the techniques and funding opportunities and to hear from one Parish, East Chiltington, which has already produced a plan. As a result, AirS is currently working with Firle, Glynde, Beddingham, South Heighton, Kingston and Plumpton to develop Parish Action Plans.

This project has been made possible by funding from *Rural Voices Rural Choices* which is the rural part of the Local Strategic Partnership in Lewes.

If you would like to talk about this project and the support available please contact the RAP project officer:

Ruth Goldstone, 01273 405458
ruth.goldstone@ruralsussex.org.uk

Portraits – Side by Side

A new European funded Interreg project, Portraits – Side by Side has just begun in East Sussex. AirS is working with Sound Architect (Music and Film) in Sussex and with French partners in the Pas-de-Calais and Somme departments on this innovative cultural project.



Side by Side aims to strengthen social inclusion and highlight the realities of living in rural areas. The project will draw directly from people's own life experiences and will encourage individuals and communities with stories to tell to get involved in making a film or video about those experiences. The aim is to use personal life stories to be an inspiration for further events and activities at community level. The films made in East Sussex will be shared with communities in northern France and there will be opportunities to visit our French partners. Our preliminary work (February and March) is to identify communities and groups in the Lewes, Wealden and Rother districts who would wish to be involved.

If you are interested and want to know more, contact:
Marilyn Eva on 01273 405453 or Amy Bath on 01273 407337

Local Food Action Plans



Would you like your village to be part of a new project on the theme of food? AirS has just had funding agreed to organise events to encourage people to enjoy and celebrate local food, and to assist in bringing people together in villages and forming local Food Forums to draw up 'Local Food Action Plans' for their area. The job of the Food Forums will be to work with AirS to gather ideas for activities which could help to work towards a more sustainable food system. Cookery sessions for families, school visits to local producers, the planting of a community orchard, an exhibition about food production now and in the past, even the opening of a village-owned shop – what happens will be up to each group of participating villages. The project even has money set aside to help finance some of the ideas. AirS staff will work with four clusters of villages in the area covered by Leader+ – which comprises all of Rother District and many of the parishes in the North and East of Wealden District.

Contact: Anne-Marie Bur on 01273 405445
Email anne-marie.bur@ruralsussex.org.uk



Mayfield and Northchapel receive their award from Alan Titchmarsh

Awards for Sussex villages in the Calor National Village of the Year

The Sussex nominations to the National Village of the Year competition did very well when the awards were announced in November. The East Sussex nomination was Mayfield and the West Sussex nomination was Northchapel. Mayfield emerged as regional category winner for older people and Northchapel won the regional category for young people.

Well done to both villages who worked hard to impress the judges throughout the three rounds.

In addition Ashington in West Sussex will be competing in 2006, which is the 10th Anniversary of the Calor Gas Village of the Year competition, in the Best of the Best Competition for all the national winners over the previous decade.

YOUR village could be Sussex Village of the Year 2006

Details of the 2006 competition are going to be sent out in March with a closing date of mid June. We would like to encourage as many villages as possible to enter and to celebrate the wealth of community activities in our villages.

If you want more information about the competition please contact Michele Condon on 01273 407325.

YOUR VIEWS

Dear Editor,

The article by Jeremy Leggett and the accompanying editorial in the AirS Autumn Newsletter represent a selective account of the social and political history of rural housing. In ascribing blame to our rural communities for their present and future problems including lack of housing for local people, both writers omit any reference to the effect that external influences have on our communities. Hence, the disposal of local authority housing by the Thatcher government must rank as the most significant factor in the history of modern housing; provision of housing through such as exception-site policies and housing associations is not necessarily the most appropriate alternative for rural areas. Yes, local people are priced out of the housing market by in-migrating families, but the latter are often escaping conditions in towns and cities. Pressure on the housing sector also stems from the continued promotion of the South East by Government and Region as the powerhouse of the UK economy.

Second, Jeremy casts blame on 'apparent popular demand' causing planning authorities to restrict housing supply in villages and takes the view many village residents are simply hostile to new housing. In contrast, to my mind the origins lie more in the public's lack of faith in the planning system being able to provide development appropriate for rural communities, e.g. affordable housing for local people.

Perhaps, similar to differing opinions on the true benefit of barn conversions to rural communities, this is a subject for which AirS with its pan-Sussex remit has developed a particular overview, when in reality there may be sufficient district (or sub-district) variations to warrant a re-appraisal.

Alex MacGillivray, Barcombe, November 2005

Please send your letters to Teresa Gittins at Action in rural Sussex (address on page 8)

People for Projects

On Saturday 21 January AirS organised a highly successful People for Projects Day in Battle. The day provided an opportunity for individuals who are working on local projects to find out more and seek practical assistance. Funders were there to discuss individual projects and there were a variety of practical workshops. So successful was the format that we are planning to repeat it in both counties later in the year.

"Well done to the AirS team on duty on Saturday who were all doing excellent work with lovely smiles on their faces!" – Maresfield Parish Councillor



Above: The Duke of Richmond (centre) with Carla Barnes (Chair) and Jeremy Leggett (CEO)

Duke of Richmond's Retirement as President 1973–2005

The AirS AGM marked the retirement of the Duke of Richmond as AirS' President, a role he took on in October 1973. The AGM was an opportunity to say thank you for that long service and keen interest and involvement in Sussex rural issues over the years. The Duke is not severing all of his links as he will remain as Chair of the Sussex Rural Housing Partnership for 2006.

To commemorate the Duke's involvement in the work of AirS over the last 35 years, AirS is launching **The Richmond Award** in 2006. This award will be made each year to an organisation (including local councils) or individual who have in the previous year taken positive action to encourage and ensure that young people remain in their local community.

Publications

You can get hold of two new publications from Action in rural Sussex. These are *Local Democracy and You, A Beginner's Guide* and *Voluntary Management Committees* – developed for childcare organisations but also more generally applicable

Crowborough Action Plan

The Crowborough Action Plan and Healthcheck Report mentioned in the last newsletter has now been published by the Crowborough Partnership and is available on www.crowborough.info or on the AirS website www.ruralsussex.org.uk

Rother Villages Action Plans project Underway

AirS is working in partnership with Rother Community Action to assist Rother communities with developing local action plans. A grant fund has also been made available by the Rother Local Strategic Partnership and grant forms are now available. We are already working with more than twelve communities.

Contact Patricia Marston: 01424 777663

Call for AirS Trustees

Action in rural Sussex, formally registered as a charity in the name of Sussex Rural Community Council, is seeking new Trustee nominations to fill a number of vacancies within the Board of Trustees, including an Honorary Treasurer.

Our Board seeks to be representative of rural Sussex and the communities within it. It is also important that we have certain skills and knowledge and geographic spread reflected by our Board members. AirS particularly welcomes applications from the following groups which are currently under-represented: younger people, black and minority ethnic groups and residents from the Chichester, Wealden, Arun and Rother areas.

We are also interested in attracting people who have one or more of the following skills and knowledge and/or a professional qualification in employment law/professional development, risk management, health and safety, finance and other legal matters.

Contact Natalie Simpson: 01273 407330



75 years – the early decades, the origins and early work

The East Sussex Rural Community Council was established in 1931 to help village halls, develop local health facilities, improve older peoples' welfare, promote drama and organise an anti litter campaign. An early focus was the Tuberculosis Prevention Campaign.

A Craftsmen Committee was formed in 1932 and in those early years there were close links with the Young Farmers Association and the East Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes. In 1935 the **Sussex Rural Community Council** was formed as work extended into West Sussex.

Music and drama development were an early focus and in 1933 orchestral and drama training was offered to villages. In 1935 SRCC organised a concert of rural orchestras at Glyndebourne and in the same year the Drama Committee organised a play festival, again at Glyndebourne. In 1936 the Music Committee inaugurated the East Sussex Rural Music School which still exists today.

Tell us what you think!

Action is the newsletter of Action in rural Sussex and is published quarterly. Please let us know what you think of it, so we can make future editions as interesting and useful as possible.

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