

# Action in rural Sussex: supporting communities in 2008/9

A year in the life of AIRS is just as energetic, lively and multi-dimensional as that of any rural village in Sussex. It seems right, therefore, to illustrate what we have been doing in terms of the impact on any one of Sussex's many villages. It is only possible to include examples of what we have achieved with communities in 2008/9 along with some key statistics about the scope of what we do. Hopefully this will give a flavour of our work. We have created the illustration used here as part of our campaign to highlight how communities can adapt to the future whilst meeting the needs of all their residents. The other side of this document shows the places where we are already committed to help; if, however, anything shown here sparks your imagination, please do contact us to see what help we can offer your community.

## Village Action Plans

The Community Planning Team provides support to communities enabling them to identify what is needed in their community and take steps to address major issues. Councillors Robert Armistead and Geoffrey Pridkin-Jones of Withoungreen said: "The Action Plan has enhanced the sense of community, identified and subsequently implemented a number of bright and beneficial ideas. It has provided with a focus for discussions on the way forward and future development of the community."

These are just some of the projects that have been achieved as a result of undertaking a community led plan.

- **Cuckfield** identified safety as a major issue and now has a monthly surgery hosted by the Police and has 26

- Neighbourhood Watch coordinators in place.
  - **Billinghurst** built a new Children's and Family Centre, which was launched in November.
  - **Westfield** received funding to support the development of a Hub for all the community, to be launched in April.
  - **Withoungreen** established a community transport a number of bright and beneficial ideas. It has provided with a focus for discussions on the way forward and future development of the community."
- Our Fieldwork Teams have worked with over 30 Parishes and eight Market Towns in 2008. In West Sussex the work is funded by West Sussex County Council and the District Councils. In East Sussex, the work is supported by the three rural District Councils.

## Pathfinder

Health and well-being 'on your doorstep' has been the key theme of this West Sussex PCT funded pilot programme.

So far three workshops with over 70 attendees, the majority from Parish Councils and Village Halls, have been held in Chichester District to work with local communities to promote the provision of health and wellbeing activities and events.

Alongside, we are working with the Rural Health Group, Rural Partnership and service providers to develop different models of service delivery, linking closely to our RASP project.

In Horsham and Mid Sussex Districts we are using the *Your Bus Your Call* mobile

resource to work with young people to help them look at their roles within their community and to give them the support and information they need to make the lifestyle choices they are faced with each day.

Frances Neave from North Mundham Parish Council thanks the programme: "...for helping the Parish Council set up a community and to give them the support people retain their independence..."

John, from Storrington, gave 'the thumbs up' to the information and support given to a group of young men about sexual health and the responsibility they as individuals need to understand and take.

## Raising the rural voice

AIRs uses a number of ways to promote the interests of rural communities and stand up for them wherever policy is being made.

- AIRs led the way in helping to redefine and understand rural needs and the Rural Share of Deprivation and this was also the focus for the very successful and well attended Annual Conference in November.
- In early 2009 AIRs produced the updated 21st Century village illustration as a tool for rural communities interested in climate change.
- The Action Newsletter, produced each quarter, raises important topical rural issues.
- The AIRs website, which has been completely renewed in the year is now an additional source of information and

support and seeks peoples' views and opinions on issues as they arise.

- AIRs Policy Position Statements are produced to influence public policy and strategy, Rural Housing and Rural Transport are the first two in the series.

During the year AIRs was involved in a range of policy and service delivery debates relevant to rural areas:

- AIRs Closures Programme and Access to Health Services consultations are both prime examples.

"Thank you for sending me the latest edition of Action. It is a fascinating magazine with lots of interesting stories. Well done!"

Bob Lacy, Chairman East Sussex County Council

## EDGE Learner Forum

The Sussex EDGE Learner Forum was set up by AIRs in January 2008. The forum is made up of young people aged 14-19, from across the county. The aim of the forum is to develop young people led projects that raise the profile of practical and vocational learning. Last year the forum identified work experience as an area in need of improvement. Forum members researched and designed a two sided poster, which aimed to share young people's and employers' expectations of each other in the workplace. It is now being distributed to rural employers by the Education Business Partnership. The poster has led to the development of workshops by

forum members, which aim to prepare both students and employers for work placements.

Founding member, Joe, 16 said of the forum: "I think it gives everyone a chance to get involved in things they wouldn't normally do and get the chance to be heard instead of doing nothing."

The Sussex forum currently has a growing membership of 18 regular members, and has two more exciting projects planned for this year. The forum is funded by EDGE, an independent education foundation, dedicated to raising the status of practical and vocational learning.

## Rural Partnerships

The Rural Partnership in each county meets four times a year, organised and managed by AIRs, to provide an overview of rural programme delivery, rural issues and trends and rural proofing of strategies and policies. They each provide reports to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and to the regional and national Rural Forums and have developed regular meetings with South East England's Regional Growth Agency (SEEDA). This year each Partnership has examined a range of issues including rural skills and training, access to health services, the effects of the recession in rural areas, the rural share of deprivation, post office closures, rural transport.

Each Rural Partnership has also organised two times a year meetings for a wider audience of rural interests groups and individuals. These helped to inform the Rural Partnership. They have focused on rural transport, employment and changes in the landbased sector, the recession in rural areas, and rural access to health services. Funding comes from DEFRA, West Sussex County Council and East Sussex County Council.

"This has been a really interesting day. I have learned a lot and been given my chance to contribute. Thank you for organising it."

Horsham Parish Councillor on the West Sussex Rural Forum

## Village Care

As a result of a need established through Kingston Village Action Plan, villages in the lower Ouse Valley have been supported to set up a monthly daytime social club. AIRs has helped the villages to identify speakers, publicise the club meetings and makes links between community activists in the villages up and down the valley. Village groups have also been encouraged to ask AIRs for assistance with other schemes, including gaining funding for a new pavilion building and improvements to accessibility in two village halls.

Kate Davies of Piddinghops said: "We have enjoyed getting

involved with the daytime club and as a result, the coffee club here have been motivated to start some additional afternoon activities here in Piddinghops. We know when to come when we need help with the next thing!"

AIRs Village Care team has worked in 32 communities this year, supporting the development of community services for older and vulnerable people. Funding is provided through East Sussex County Council and the NHS. We also work in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society and have supported 250 vulnerable people through the Isolation Action Group projects in Chichester.

## Village Halls

Northchapel Village Hall re-opened in January 2009 following four years raising £200,000 to refurbish the old hall which badly needed modernisation. Use had dropped so income was falling. Two Big Lottery Fund bids failed, a third smaller bid was successful and Chichester District Council and Northchapel Parish Council were key funders.

AIRs provided advice on engaging the community in fundraising efforts, possible grant sources, meeting funders' criteria and carried out an energy efficiency survey to support grant applications. Staff met trustees and parish councillors four times since 2003, provided ACRE publications (eg about, access for disabled people and VAT), encouragement and answered questions by phone and email. Trustees attended AIRs training events.

Pam Bruce, one of the project leaders,

wrote in January 2008 after advice about funding from the parish priest: "Your continuing support and advice is so much appreciated. I don't know how we would see this project through without you."

AIRs is supporting 57 capital community building projects in West Sussex and around 25 in East Sussex. Three West Sussex communities were successful in obtaining grants from the Big Lottery Fund Community Buildings Programme in Spring 09: **Bracklesham Bay, Bogrove and Fishbourne**, but twelve were unsuccessful. West Sussex County Council provided partner funding to support these applications.

AIRs community buildings service has been funded this year by West Sussex County Council, all District Councils, membership fees, a donation from Anon insurers and advertisers in the quarterly village hall mailing.

## Rural access to services

Making links to improve services Work is underway in Etchingham, supported by the Parish Council, to look at how to improve access to services for people living or working in the area.

This is part of the rural access to services programme (RASP), in which AIRs staff are working with locations identified in research as having gaps in services or long distances required to travel to them.

AIRs is helping by providing support to investigate what gaps exist and formulate a plan for improvements, then with help to take the plan forward, including the possibility of developing social enterprises as well as

linking with other service providers.

In the next two years AIRs plans to work with ten locations across East and West Sussex and will use the information gained to inform future service planning. AIRs will also work with eight parishes to develop information points for their village.

Barbara Beaton, project development and social enterprise support officer, said: "Trying to improve transport arrangements and making sure that the right information is readily available for everyone who needs it will be an important part of the work."

This is a SEEDA funded programme developed by the East Sussex Rural Partnership.

## Sussex Voluntary & Community Sector Learning Consortium

Action in rural Sussex is the accountable partner for this consortium of 60 voluntary and community organisations providing learning and training opportunities. This year it has:

- organised research on the voluntary and community in supporting adults who want to learn for work or for leisure.
- provided courses for about 400 people through the Neighbourhood Learning Project. Associated capital funding has helped organisations to buy equipment to support adult learning activities or to equip or refurbish buildings where adult learning takes place.
- as a partner in the Survey of Community Action 4

Counties Project, provided funding for three team building sessions and evening training courses in East and West Sussex and worked with partners in West Sussex to run two very successful Finding Funding Training Days.

- ran an event with guest speakers from NIACE (National Institute for Adult Continuing Education) and the IfL (Institute for Learning) to support those who teach adults.
- provided outreach support that has enabled eleven organisations in Sussex to access Community Grants to help people back into employment.

Funding has come from the Learning & Skills Council, Big Lottery, European Social Fund.

## Family outreach

At times families extra support. Rural families need a service that offers timely help locally at home, school and community.

COPES offers just such a service across rural East Sussex and works with over 250 families per year individually and helps organise and run a range of parent support groups as well as supporting families to access a wide range of other services.

Jenny was 12 and lived with her dad and step mum. After a time school suggested to the family that they contact COPES as Jenny was falling behind at school and seemed unhappy. The family agreed they wanted to improve family relations. Jenny was able to share how she felt and Annie, the COPES worker, helped

her tell her family. Annie helped Jenny deal with her feelings about her parent's separation, her forthcoming adolescence and her friendships. Annie helped Jenny's father and step mum offer consistent boundaries and ideas on parenting and helped father and Jenny's own mum negotiate over contact with his son. Jenny's dad went to parent group and learnt to manage his anger better. The family ceased to work with COPES after 12 weeks and Jenny was clearly happier with improved behaviour at school.

AIRs is able to provide rural families with outreach services as a result of contracts with East Sussex County Council to provide this extra support.

## Play – Play Out Programme (Lewes District)

The Play Out Project is a two year programme (2008 and 2009) to deliver play based activities in parks and open spaces in the Lewes District targeting 8-16 year olds. The aim is to encourage greater positive use of parks by children and young people in the community.

We worked in partnership with Lewes YMCA, Newhaven Community Development Association, Nippers in Newhaven and Lewes District Council. Funding came from the Big Lottery Fund via Lewes District Council. Using the AIRs mobile unit we visited six rural villages these were Barcombe, Chalvey, Cooksbridge, Newick Ringmer and Wivelsfield.

The activities that children and young people enjoyed included den building, badge making, clay, arts and crafts and puppet making.

Sam aged 9 said: "Den building is great, I've never done it before, I don't normally use the park because the dogs scare me."

In 2008 over 100 Children and Young People attended 12 sessions, all of the sessions managed to take place despite our battle with the weather.

AIRs has also developed the Rother Play Project which is funded through Rother District Council and works across the Rother area to provide play services to children and young people aged 8-16.

## Housing

In 2007 the village hall enabler undertook a housing needs survey in Barcombe, East Sussex following an approach from the parish council who recognised that local people were struggling to find accommodation in the village. The need for affordable housing was identified through the survey to the formation of a housing working group which identified and appraised a number of sites for their suitability for a small development.

We then organised two community consultation events to enable to community to have their say on the site and the scheme being proposed. At the first of these one resident wrote: "This village is dying... 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 Barcombe, the parish council took the initiative and following a period of negotiation between all concerned a scheme of twelve affordable homes on an exception site at the edge of the village started on site in March 2009. AIRs has worked with 32 parishes over the year, undertaken 10 housing needs surveys and appraised approximately 100 sites. We were able to help in this case through funding from Hastoe housing association and Lewes District Council.

## ChangeUp – East and West Sussex

East and the West Sussex ChangeUp Consortia include representatives from the voluntary and community and the public sectors. They monitor the development of support services for voluntary and community organisations and feed this back to Capacitybuilders, which funds the programmes.

The Big Event was held at the International Tennis Centre in Eastbourne in December 2008. This was very well attended and included:

- people being able to share their experiences and get information and support available.
- the launch of [www.askasper.org.uk](http://www.askasper.org.uk) – a new website designed to support community groups in East Sussex.

The promotion of the SpeakUp Countywide Forum –

developing a strong voice for voluntary and community groups in East Sussex.

- the Annual Review and the work of the East Sussex ChangeUp Consortium

Feedback from the event showed that people found the opportunity to network very useful, the speakers informative and the presentations interesting.

Activities in West Sussex this year included:

- a survey of the support provided to voluntary and community organisations
- voluntary and community sector representatives providing input into the Local Area Agreement and the Sustainable Community Strategy
- funding secured for work with support organisations that work with minority groups

## Food and community – local food in school cookery

In order to support a more sustainable food system, we worked with secondary schools to help students make informed food choices by linking visits to local farms with school cookery, using produce from each farm as the principal ingredient in follow-up cookery lessons.

The visits give students a better understanding of:

- farmers' skills
- seasonality
- food production and the local economy (eg. many of the farms visited sell their food locally)

the benefits for both consumers and producers of buying local food – enhanced freshness and taste, fairer prices, reduced food miles etc.

- production methods (organic or not, free-range, intensive etc.)
- cooking healthy meals from local raw seasonal ingredients

Visits were organised for 30 secondary school CCSE Food and Nutrition students from Thomas Bennett Community College to farms, including David Dean's organic livestock farm at Lindfield where students viewed the livestock,

watched a butcher cut up a carcass and sampled pork sausages. They took meat back from the farm to cook healthy meals. The Food Studies Subject Leader said: "This experience has given me confidence to visit farming environments. The most crucial part was someone there to give guidance, support and personal reliable contact". AIRs worked with five secondary schools, benefiting 130 young people, 6 teachers, and 14 farms. Funding was provided by WSSC and East Sussex PCT.

Illustration by Chris Watson 2009

## Who to contact

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