

Action

The newsletter of Action in rural Sussex
Issue N° 20
October 2010

Rural futures in a time of change



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Fractal society

What do they mean by Big Society? This is the question I keep getting asked, usually by people who have spent half their lives as Trustees of the Village Hall, Parish Councillors and volunteers for the Playgroup, and who also try to fit in between this, taking their elderly neighbour shopping. Rural villages have been 'Big' in this sense for years.

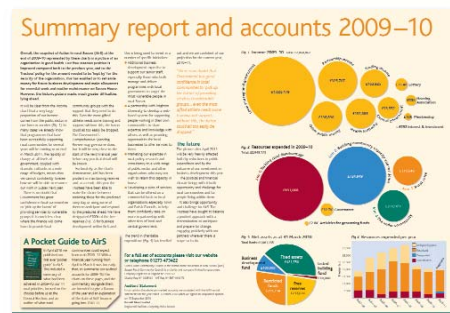
As we go to press, the news arrives that Benoit Mandelbrot has died; one of the most innovative thinkers of the 20th Century and the man who came up with the term 'fractals' and the mathematics that lie behind them. Fractals contain the property of self-similarity; in other words, however much you magnify them, you find the same shapes repeated down to an almost infinite level.

Perhaps what rural communities have to teach the Coalition Government is the

trick not of a Big Society, but a 'fractal society'. One in which the commitment, engagement and vigour that exists in so many of our rural communities is translated upwards into the philosophy of local and central government. Of course, the trick about a fractal structure is that you invest time and effort into a self generating system, not into micro managing the precise shape that emerges at the end. Support communities with help and expertise, and they will find the precise shape of solutions that fit.

Jeremy Leggett

Chief Executive, Action in rural Sussex (AirS)



Inside: summary report and accounts 2009-10

Back page: AirS at 80



Annual Conference

Over 170 people attended a packed AirS Annual Conference held at Slaugham Manor on 23 September. The aim of the Conference was to explore emerging policy directions as identified by the new Coalition Government and how these might impact locally, and to celebrate the achievements of rural communities in developing local services and facilities as demonstrated by 13 community displays at the Conference.

The main policy discussion focused on the principles of the Big Society, see page 6, and Sylvia Brown, Chief Executive of Action with Communities in Rural England, warned that there are real challenges for rural communities in some of the policies emerging under the Big Society 'umbrella'. However, she concluded that rural communities can deliver the Big Society, and manage challenges and change, but only if:

- 1 New policy hurdles are not imposed such as referendums, ignoring the role of parish and town councils.
- 2 Local Planning Authorities work with rural stakeholders to create policies that will meet local needs without an over reliance on the 'Right to Build'.
- 3 Future service delivery is negotiated between local government and individual communities.
- 4 Communities have a chance to plan their response to any loss of services in a way that is holistic and sustainable.
- 5 Implementation makes a virtue of the current culture and practice in rural communities, rather than ignoring or replacing them with universal models that are based on urban culture and practice.



Above: Sylvia Brown, Chief Executive of ACRE and Margaret Paren, Chair South Downs National Park Authority

Sylvia Brown summarised by saying, "The whole Conference provides proof that the Big Society is already being achieved across rural Sussex, but we must ensure that this existing rural community effort and practice, and particularly the role of town and parish councils, is recognised rather than ignored in the new policies and proposals."

Margaret Paren, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority (NPA), brought everyone up to date with the progress being made by the NPA and the future role of the Authority. The Authority will become fully operational on 1 April 2011 when it will take on its full responsibilities and become the local planning authority and the access authority for the area. Margaret emphasised that the NPA is

beginning work on the development of the Management Plan and she invited all communities within

"The Conference is proof that the Big Society is being achieved across rural Sussex, but we must ensure that... the role of town and parish councils, is recognised in the new policies and proposals."

Sylvia Brown, ACRE

the Park to get involved in the discussions that will be starting in the autumn.

Jeremy Leggett, AirS Chief Executive, warned of the possible effect of cutbacks in public sector funding on rural communities. "We know cuts in public sector are coming and we must ensure that rural communities are not disproportionately affected by these cutbacks because of an urban area focus of funding allocations. Public sector organisations must also recognise that communities are best placed to make their own decisions and will spend money

"We do need continuity and a period of transition to any new arrangements. Change is good, but not if it does away with existing best practice and innovation."

Jeremy Leggett, AirS



wisely. However, we do need continuity and a period of transition to any new arrangements. Change is good, but not if it does away with existing best practice and innovation."

In the afternoon, Councillor Louise Goldsmith of West Sussex County Council and Becky Shaw, Chief Executive of East Sussex County Council, provided an early insight into the priorities at their Councils. They both acknowledged that all would be much clearer in a few months when the details of the Comprehensive Spending Review are known.

All keynote presentations are on the AirS website at www.ruralsussex.org.uk



What the delegates said...

"As usual, an excellent occasion! I always learn something"

"Good idea to see what the Big Society means on the ground – I have ideas I will take away"

"Very useful policy updates and good networking opportunities"

"Interesting subjects in a difficult time"

"Good networking opportunity"

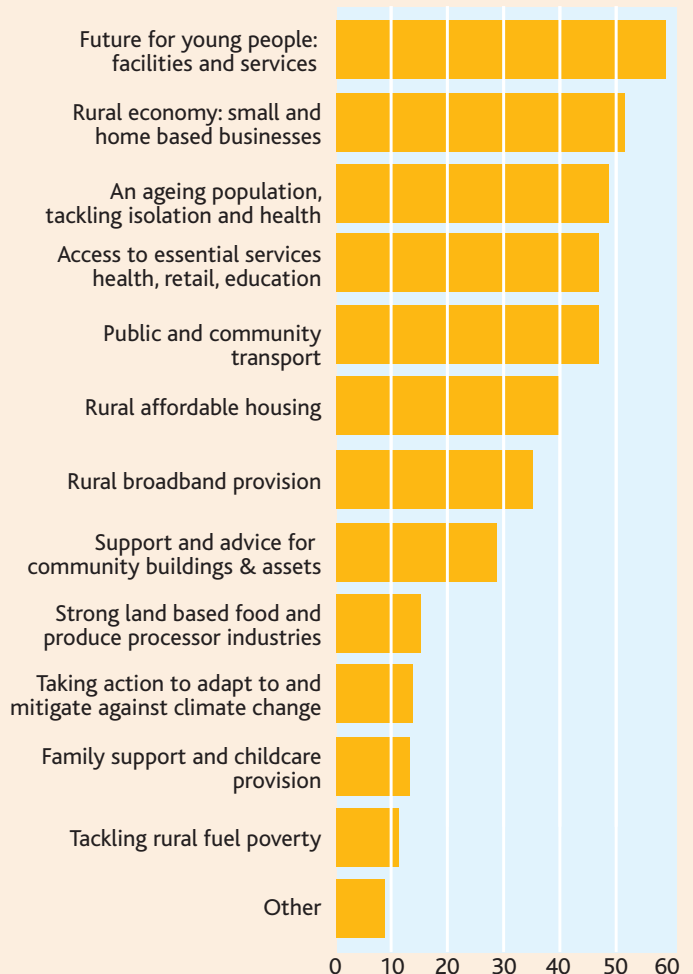
Conference consultation

Rural priorities for 2011

Action in rural Sussex asked participants to identify rural priorities and issues for 2011. As a result, and alongside other evidence and consultations, AirS will use this information to determine its strategy and advocacy work programme for the coming year.

The three main priorities identified for 2011 were:

- 1 Ensuring a future for young people in rural communities – facilities and services.
- 2 Strengthening the rural economy – small business and home based businesses.
- 3 An ageing population – tackling isolation and health issues.



Celebrating success in



The Annual Conference also showcased a variety of projects from a range of rural communities across Sussex. These were grouped together under three separate themes covering market towns and enterprise, community action planning and community projects. Representatives from the towns and villages were on hand to talk through their experiences, highlighting the issues that their hard work had tackled.



Susan Pyper,
Lord Lieutenant
of West Sussex,
who visited the
community
stands said:

"I am so impressed with all the rural community projects that I have heard about today. It just goes to show how much can be achieved when we work together. Of course it takes determination, hard work and true community spirit.

What is striking though is the enthusiasm of those involved, and the pride they rightly have in their own villages – they really enjoy making things happen. So much is going on already, but there is so much more we can do in West and East Sussex!"

Room 1 Market towns and enterprise

This room highlights the work of our market towns, supported by Action in rural Sussex (AirS) and West Sussex County Council under the Small Market Towns programme.

Billingshurst focuses on the building of a new children's centre for the community, a project that required partnership working to achieve.

Both **Henfield** and **Hassocks** Community Partnerships demonstrate the breadth of projects that communities can get involved with. These include, in Henfield, the introduction of a community bus, and the implementation of a 'greening' campaign, including energy audits and a plastic bag free



Room 2 Community action planning

A walk through this room demonstrates how some of Sussex's villages are listening to the needs of their residents and taking positive action to address them.

Ardingly, Funtington and **Plumpton** all undertook community led plans, consulting widely, prioritising the key issues and then planning actions to tackle the top priorities.

Talking to **Ardingly**, the delegate would be struck by how they have consulted with all elements of their community, from young people to local businesses and voluntary groups.

Funtington's stand focuses on the affordable housing issue which was raised originally in their Action Plan. The plan saw 85% of respondents supporting low cost housing and the need was established by further surveys. The whole process saw real partnership working between the Parish Council, Chichester District Council, HydeMartlet, the social landlord, AirS and, of course, local residents. This has ensured that the community has had a say in the design and building of the housing and highlights the importance of good communication.

Plumpton published its Plan in July 2008 following surely one of the most comprehensive and successful consultations in Sussex, with a response rate of 82% from across the community. Since then a huge volunteer



town. In Hassocks, current projects include a village market, a visiting cinema, an internet cafe and a community cycle hire business at the Railway Station.

A major success of the **Storrington & Sullington** Community Partnership has been the development of a community hub that hosts a range of services that initially included children and family services, the provision of mobile JobCentre Plus services and the creation of a community transport information post.

All of these projects were identified as a result of community consultation and prioritisation and they also help to ensure that market towns continue to provide a vital function as local hubs for services and economic activity.

rural communities

team has got stuck into delivering an array of projects, including a youth forum that has organised a safety awareness programme, a green team that has introduced further recycling and has run energy saving events, and a transport team that has successfully lobbied for an additional bus service trialling this winter.



Room 3 Community projects

The third room of our tour showcases a broad range of projects throughout the two Counties.

Dial Post, Fishbourne and **Tangmere** have all had success in building new or extending community buildings/village halls to meet the changing needs of their residents. The hard work involved in pulling together the funding and meeting the legal requirements for projects such as this shouldn't be underestimated and credit should be given to the volunteers involved.

Hartfield, nestled in the Ashdown Forest, runs projects that help to address the isolated nature of its location. These include a volunteer car scheme,

which AirS helped to establish, which offers transport for medical appointments and social visits. They also run a social group for the elderly and a lunch club that is very well attended.

Lastly, **Selsey** and **Westfield** have benefited from being part of AirS' Rural Access to Services programme. Selsey now has an active volunteer timebank, with voluntary activity being swapped within the community. The other project is the regular visit of the JobCentre Plus bus, brokered by AirS. This has been a real success with over 60 people using the service to date. Westfield, in East Sussex, set up a community hub with funding and advice from AirS which provides a range of information services and activities, including computer classes and a book exchange.



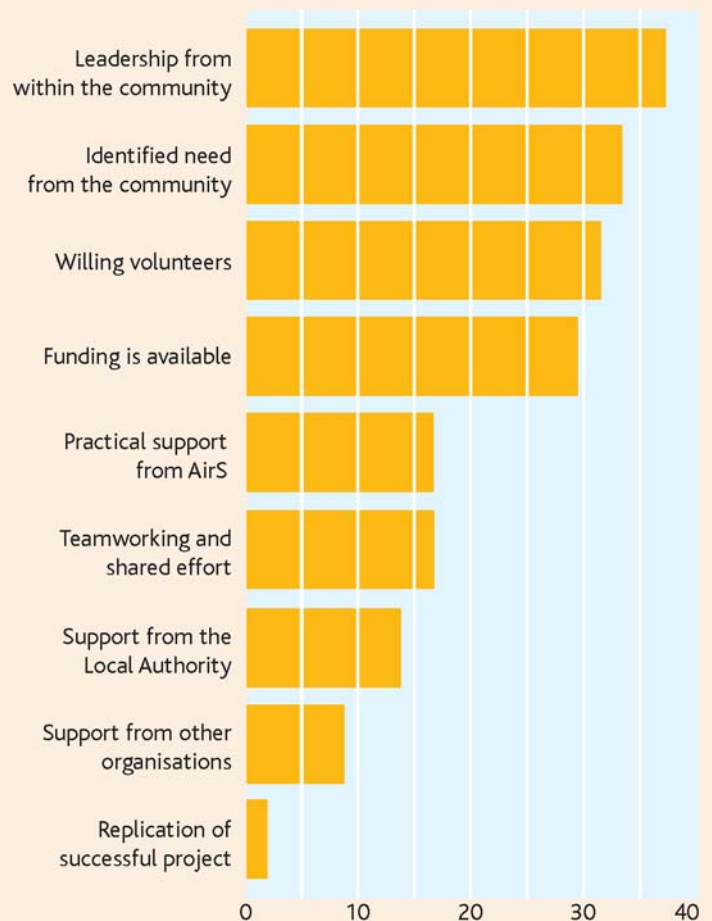
AirS would like to thank each of these communities for making the time to be such a crucial part of the Annual Conference.

Conference consultation

Local leadership is vital to successful initiatives

Participants at the Conference were asked to visit the stands and consider the main factors that led to the success of the projects on display. The conclusions were that local leadership and the identification of need and local support for an idea were the most important factors that helped to determine its success. The need for local volunteers came third. The full results are shown in the table.

Factors essential in ensuring the success of community projects





Feedback from the work groups



There were some consistent messages from the work group sessions held at the Annual Conference. These explored the opportunities and barriers presented by Big Society ideas.

The messages were:

- The Big Society is already happening across rural Sussex, but information, advice and funding support is needed.
- Do not change what is already working well; spread what is working well.
- Do not overburden volunteers. Some initiatives are fraught with red tape, legislation and potential liability issues which means that volunteers are hard to find.
- Provide clarity of legislation, expectations and guidance to community groups. Provide community groups with support and advice.
- Support local leaders and help leaders to emerge.
- Harness and support local enthusiasm.

For summaries of each work group discussion go to www.ruralsussex.org.uk and follow the links to the Annual Conference information.



Briefing Note

The Big Society – what we know so far

The Big Society remains a framework or a vision, rather than a detailed policy, as described below.

- Giving local people and not for profit organisations the opportunity to take over the running of public services.
- Giving more control to citizens over what happens in their area.
- More people involved in community action; groups in every community.
- Every adult involved in a local community group.
- 'Right to Bid' will allow people to bid to take over the running of any local public service that could be better run by the community.
- The Localism Bill is at the heart of the Big Society and will transfer power and decision making from central government to local authorities and to the local level. The 'Community Right to Build' is to be part of the Localism Bill.
- A Big Society Bank to be set up to provide finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and non governmental bodies.
- The Government wants to see a significant increase in voluntary action. They have announced training for 5000 Community Organisers funded by the Government.

Further detail is promised by the Government.



There was a real buzz about the potential of the **Community 21 project**, a joint venture between AirS and the University of Brighton. When fully operational this will provide a web-based platform for community led planning and community information and networking.

A prototype is being built at the moment and one of the purposes of the presentation was to invite interest from communities, that are just embarking on a community led plan or looking to review an existing one, to take part in the piloting and evaluation of the prototype.

So far, over 20 communities have expressed an interest.

Action in rural Sussex

Summary report and accounts 2009–10

Achievements during 2009–10

- Our Village Care programme in East Sussex reached over 1300 vulnerable people through support for local voluntary schemes.
- Our Fieldwork Team helped 31 villages, mainly in West Sussex, promote local health and well-being through local Community Led Plans.
- We rolled out a dedicated website to support Community Led Plans and trained 70 parishes and 32 local authority officers in its use.
- Our 11 locally placed Family Outreach Workers reached 363 families in East Sussex with parenting support. The project also helped run four parent groups.
- We campaigned for village hall capital funding through the Heart of the Village campaign and a Downing Street petition. As a direct result, in February 2010 the Big Lottery Fund announced a new funding programme to become available in the autumn.
- Through our partnership with Surrey Community Action, £300,000 has been allocated to organisations working with unemployed people in Sussex from the South East European Social Fund Community Grants programme.
- Our housing and research teams carried out 11 housing needs surveys, appraising over 100 sites, with four planning applications having been submitted and two, 12 unit developments for local people coming to fruition in March 2010.

This is the tip of the iceberg of what we have achieved over the year. None of it would be possible without active partnerships with a wide range of statutory and other organisations.

Chair's report



I picked up the Chair's baton from Kathryn Field at the AGM in November 2009 and have found myself leading a very committed group of Trustees who bring extensive knowledge and expertise to Action in rural Sussex's work.

I would like to welcome two new Trustees, Chantal Wilson and Carole Nicholson, both of whom are already making a substantial contribution to the Board.

I make no apology for the strong emphasis we place on raising awareness of how disadvantage affects rural people and rural communities. This is all too easily forgotten in the face of more visible urban needs.

As a charity, Action in rural Sussex (AirS) is only able to make a difference to rural communities through grants from and contracts and service agreements with our partners. I pass on our sincere thanks to all of them.

Thanks are also due to our faithful members, for their continuing support, both

financially and with practical assistance. Whilst the majority are from village organisations and parish councils, we appreciate also the individual members, and would hope that in the future they can assist us in increasing our total membership.

I believe we provide excellent value for money and could do more in the future as resources become even tighter for the public sector. We have a highly committed staff team who are cognisant of the difficulties ahead, and I am confident that their commitment and skills will help us find new ways of addressing the needs of those we serve.

Patrick Shanahan
Chairman,
Action in rural Sussex

Trustees as at April 2010

Barby Dashwood-Hall
Honorary Treasurer

Richard Farhall

Rodney Jackson

Rosemary Molony

Carole Nicholson

Roger Paterson

Graham Peters

David Robins

William de Salis
Vice-Chair, East Sussex

Patrick Shanahan
Chairman

Jack Slaughter
Vice-Chair, West Sussex

Andrew Stewart-Roberts

Meg Stroude

Chantal Wilson

Summary report and

Overall, the snapshot of Action in rural Sussex (AirS) at the end of 2009–10 represented by these charts is a picture of an organisation in good health. Our free reserves position is improved compared both to the previous year, and to the Trustees' policy for the amount needed to be 'kept by' for the security of the organisation. This has enabled us to set aside money for future business development and make allowances for essential work and routine maintenance on Sussex House. However, the historic picture masks much greater difficulties lying ahead.

It will be clear from the income chart that a very large proportion of our income comes from the public sector in one form or another (Fig. 1). In many cases we already know that programmes that have been successfully supporting rural communities for several years will be coming to an end in March 2011. The rapidity of change at all levels of government, coupled with dramatic cutbacks in a wide range of budgets, means that we cannot confidently foresee how we will be able to resource our work in Sussex next year.

There is no doubt that Government has great confidence in local communities to 'pick up the baton' of providing services to vulnerable groups; it is much less clear where the finance will come from to provide local

community groups with the support that they need to do this. Even the most gifted athlete needs some training and support; without this, the baton could all too easily be dropped. The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review may give some clues, but it will be very close to the start of the next financial year before any practical detail will be known.

Fortunately, as the charts demonstrate, AirS has been prudent in maintaining reserves and, as a result, this year the Trustees have been able to make the choice between retaining these for the predicted rainy day or using some of them to anticipate and respond to the pressures ahead. We have designated £100k of the free reserves (Fig. 3) for business development within AirS, and

communities could expect from us in 2010–11. With a financial year running from April to March it was too early, then, to summarise our audited accounts for 2009–10. The charts on these pages, and the commentary alongside them, are intended to give a flavour of the year and an explanation of the state of AirS' finances going into 2010–11.

this is being used to invest in a number of specific initiatives:

- Additional business development expertise to support our senior staff, especially those who both manage and deliver programmes with local government to target the most vulnerable people in rural Sussex.
- A partnership with Brighton University to develop a web-based system for supporting people working in their own communities to share expertise and knowledge with others, as well as providing opportunities for local businesses to offer services to them.
- Marketing our expertise in rural policy, research and consultancy to a wide range of public sector and other organisations who may not wish to retain this capacity in house.
- Developing a suite of services that can be offered on a commercial basis to local organisations, especially Town and Parish Councils, to help them confidently take on more in partnership with other tiers of local and central government.

The trend in charitable expenditure (Fig. 4) has levelled

out and we are confident of our projection for the current year, 2010–11.

"There is no doubt that Government has great confidence in local communities to 'pick up the baton' of providing services to vulnerable groups... even the most gifted athlete needs some training and support; without this, the baton could all too easily be dropped."

The future

The picture after April 2011 will be very heavily affected both by reductions in public expenditure and by the outcome of our investment in business development this year.

The political and financial climate brings with it both opportunity and challenge for rural communities and for people living within them.

It also brings opportunity and challenge for AirS. The Trustees have sought to balance a prudent approach with a determination to anticipate and prepare for change; engaging positively with our partners wherever there is scope so to do.

A Pocket Guide to AirS



In April 2010 we published our first ever 'pocket guide' to AirS. This included a summary of what had been achieved in 2009–10, our 11 rural priorities, focused on the choices before us at the General Election, and an outline of what rural

For a full set of accounts please visit our website or telephone 01273 473422

Sussex Rural Community Council is the formal name for Action in rural Sussex (AirS). Sussex Rural Community Council is a charity and company limited by guarantee. Company registered in England N° 2907172 Charity Reg N° 1035401 VAT Reg N° 587 4943 79

Auditors' Statement

In our opinion the above summarised accounts are consistent with the full financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2010 which we signed an unqualified opinion on 15 September 2010

Russell New Limited

Registered Auditors, Steyning, West Sussex

accounts 2009–10

Fig. 1 Income 2009–10 Total: £2,060,862

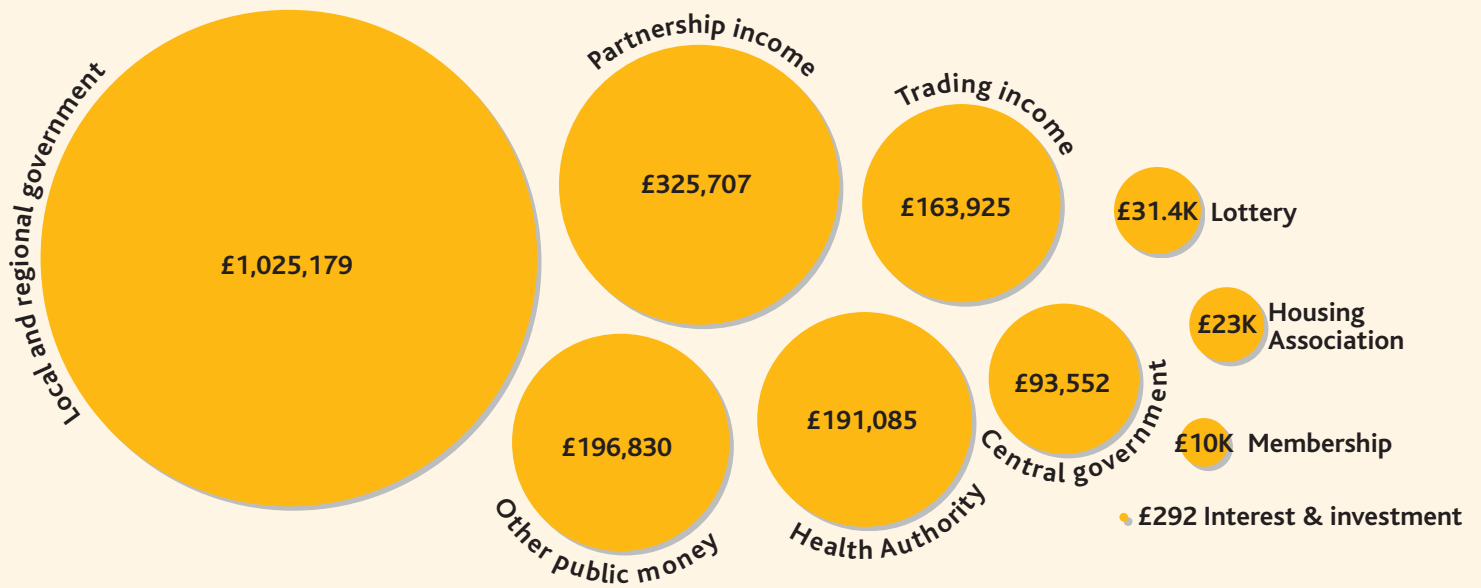


Fig. 2 Resources expended in 2009–10 Total: £2,043,175

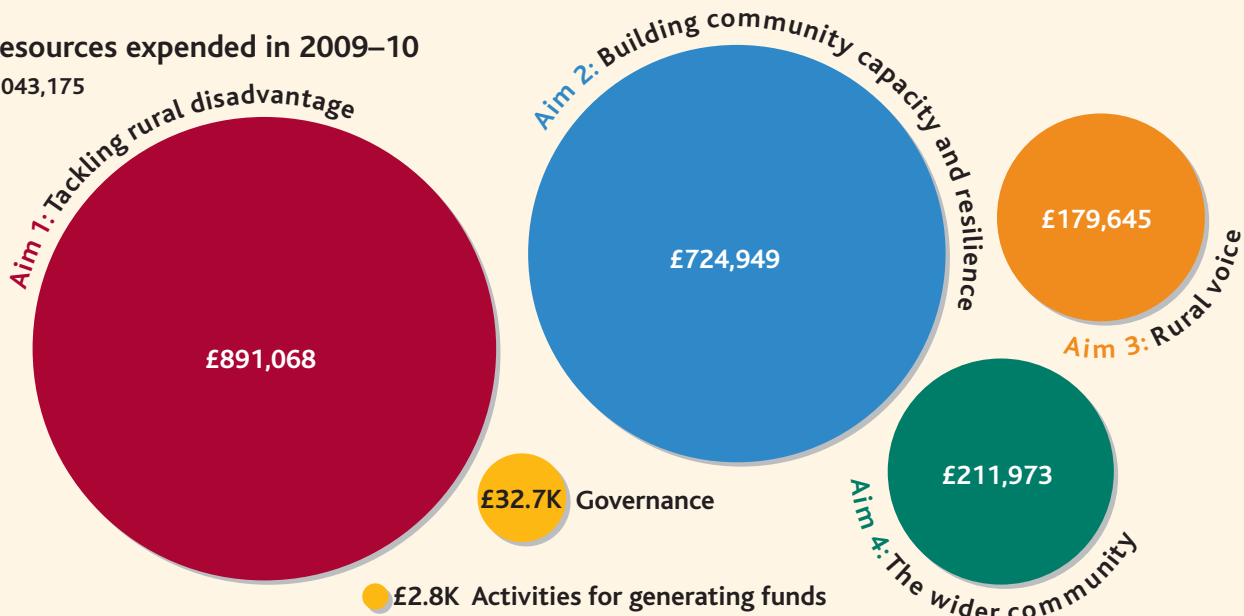


Fig. 3 Net assets as at 31 March 2010 Total funds: £1,061,135

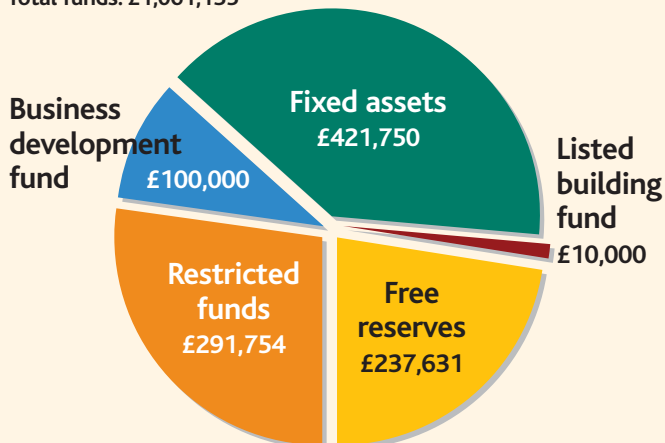
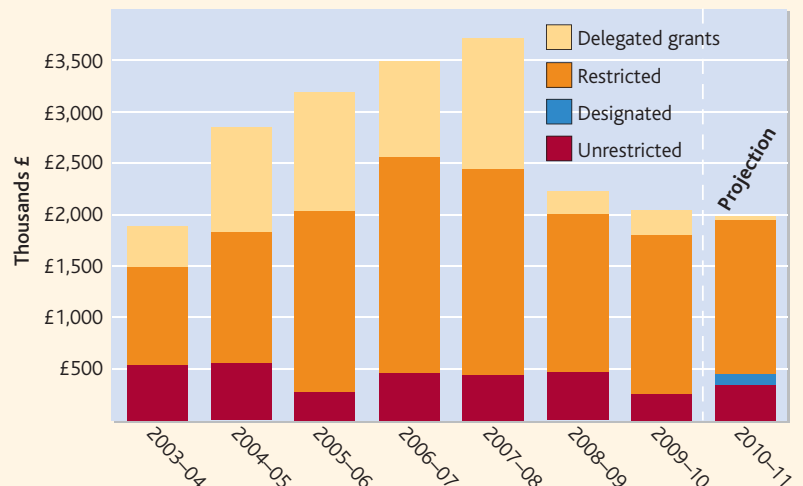


Fig. 4 Resources expended per year



Jeremy Leggett	01273 407331
Chief Executive	
Natalie Simpson	01273 407330
Company Secretary and PA to the Chief Executive	

Fieldwork and operations team

Pat Buesnel	01273 405441
Head of Fieldwork	
Mark McTaggart	01273 405448
West Sussex County Team Manager	
David Ely	01273 405455
Services Manager – Children and Young People and Families	
Liz Allsobrook	01273 405454
East Sussex Senior Development Officer	
Les Ampstead	01798 875402
Rural Towns Development Officer	
Faustina Bayo	01273 405885
Action Plans Development Officer	
Barbara Beaton	01424 893698
Social Enterprise and Project Support Officer	
Louise Beaton	01243 544366
Village Halls Policy Advisor	
Ali Cardosi	01273 405444
Community Health Development Officer	
Judith Clark	07961 681450
Family Outreach Worker	
Sharon Davies	07961 616259
Family Outreach Worker	
Annette Davis	07824 900037
Family Outreach Worker	
Sarah Day	07961 619746
West Sussex Access to Services Officer	
Sashka Dunlop	07969 614774
Family Outreach Worker	
Fiona Dunford	07961 616490
Family Outreach Worker	
Zoe Ganderton	07786 980715
Project Officer – Children and Young People	
Judy Gerhold	07968 715105
Family Outreach Worker	

Nan Hacking	01424 882026
Development Officer – Village Care and Volunteer Support Programme	

Joanna Harper	01273 405880
Rural Isolation Development Officer	

Loretta Hepburn	01273 405882
Project Manager – Your Bus Your Call	

Peter Lloyd	
Volunteer	

Malindi Lovegrove	07961 616442
East Sussex Access to Services Officer	

Felicia McGarry	07899 894975
Senior Family Outreach Worker	

Catherine Mellor	07824 900116
Family Outreach Worker	

Johanna Partridge	07854 249014
Senior Family Outreach Worker	

Caroline Rix	01273 405881
Rural Childcare Development Officer	

Caroline Scotter	01424 775400
Development Officer – Village Care and Volunteer Support Programme	

Indira Seeram	07772 796745
Family Outreach Worker	

Glynnis Tucker	07824 900092
Family Outreach Worker	

Rowena Tyler	01798 344612
West Sussex Access to Services Officer	

Patsy Wimbush	07961 614839
West Sussex Rural Migrants Network Officer and East Sussex Community Heritage Project Officer	

Local governance / Sussex Associations of Local Councils team (SALC)

Trevor Leggo	01273 476342
Head of Local Governance Services / SALC	

Jacqueline Simes	01273 476342
Administrative Officer	

Isabelle Swan	01273 476342
Assistant Administrator	

Strategy, communications and partnerships team

Teresa Gittins	01273 405442
Head of Strategy and Communications	

Su Mitchell	01273 405883
Partnership Manager	

Annemarie Allen	
Volunteer	

Anne-Marie Bur	01273 405445
Senior Development Officer – Food and Local Produce	

Emma Drew	01273 405886
Business Development Advisor	

Simon Kiley	01273 405451
Research and Policy Officer	

Renate Ruether-Greaves	01273 405446
East Sussex ChangeUp Co-ordinator	

Tom Warder	01273 479008
Senior Rural Housing Development Officer	

Shahnaz Zarif	01273 405884
Research Officer	

Business team

Anne Mari Barker-Davies	01273 407300
Head of Finance	

Diane Morgan	01273 407320
Quality and Training Manager	

Georgina Nienstaedt	01273 407339
Human Resources Manager	

Steve Roberts	01273 407335
ICT Manager	

Andrew Hart	01273 407303
Finance Officer	

Robin Roper	01273 407303
Senior Finance Officer	

Administration support team

Dawn Brock	01273 407313
Administration Manager	

Nicola Dudley	01273 407301
Administrator	

Harry Forster	01273 407325
Apprentice Administrator	

Claire Reynolds	01273 407305
Administrator	

Email contact: All AirS staff can be contacted via email by using:
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Action in rural Sussex, Sussex House, 212 High Street, Lewes BN7 2NH
Helpline: 0845 873 6165 **Tel:** 01273 473422 **Fax:** 01273 483109



Service development 2011



"Without a meeting place our community will wither, but please don't ask too much of volunteers"

Such was the feedback from the Community Asset work group at the Action in rural Sussex (AirS) Annual Conference at Slaugham Manor on 23 September.

It shows the importance of professional support to local communities in developing voluntary action, access to services and social assets. Rural communities already show how the Big Society can work in action, but a very great deal more is now being asked of those communities as a result of the public sector cuts.

At AirS, we have worked for nearly 80 years to develop new initiatives to address new needs, so we are well placed to help in a time of change.

In the changing policy and funding environment, it is more important than ever that communities know how we can help, from enabling affordable rural housing to communicating rural priorities to policymakers. Communities have always been and will continue to be at the heart of what we do. We believe we lead understanding of rural issues across Sussex.

However, as the summarised Trustees' Report and Accounts for 2009-10 make clear, our services to rural communities

"In the changing policy and funding environment, it is more important than ever that communities know how we can help..."

Jeremy Leggett, CEO,
Action in rural Sussex

are substantially paid for from the public purse, albeit from many different compartments. We have been able to provide professional advice and guidance to communities without having to make a charge. This is now starting to change and will continue to do so over the coming years. As an example, it costs us nearly £80,000 per year to maintain an expert service to Sussex's 200 plus village halls. We know it is unrealistic to expect all village halls to pay all this, but we do think there may be options by which this can be shared between halls, parish councils, local authorities and other sources of charitable income that AirS can pursue.

We are keen to continue our explorations with local authority partners and others, looking at how services can be afforded and how income to

pay for them can be diversified. And we are examining how AirS can be financially robust in coming years to ensure the continuity of support.

And we are keen to hear from as many people as possible about what is most important to you about the work AirS

"We are keen to hear from as many people as possible about what is most important to you about the work AirS does, or could do, in your community."

does, or could do, in your community. And of course what the financial implications are.

Please go online to let us know what you think: the survey takes only a couple of minutes and will help us identify the best ways to support you in future. It can be found at www.surveymonkey.com/s/AirSFeedback

We can provide the form in hard copy or in large print if you prefer. Just get in touch.

Thank you. For more information contact Emma Drew on 01273 405886



During the summer, the Rural Coalition made up of key bodies representing rural interests, published *The Rural Challenge – Achieving Sustainable Communities for the 21st Century*, a document which sets out the key issues which the Coalition Government will need to address if rural

communities are to remain both economically and socially viable. It argues that the long-term decline in rural service investment should not be allowed to deteriorate further to the detriment of rural dwellers and that rural communities are exceptionally well placed to deliver against the Government's vision of a Big Society.

A stark warning is outlined in the report that if certain trends which already having a significant impact on rural areas, such as shortages of affordable housing and the closure of shops, are allowed to continue, rural areas will become only accessible to the most wealthy and will lose many of the key features which make them unique social environments. The argument is also made that in a time of significant cuts in public sector spending full impact assessments are needed to ensure the reductions are distributed evenly and fairly.

What is the Rural Coalition?

The Rural Coalition was formed in September 2008 supported by the Commission for Rural Communities and chaired by Lord Matthew Taylor. The Rural Coalition comprises the following organisations:

- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
This is the national organisation of AirS and other rural community councils
- The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
- The Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
- The Local Government Group
- The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
- The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)

It is also supported and advised by a wide range of private, public and third sector organisations.

It was formed in order to bring key organisations with a rural interest together so that they could highlight rural needs and issues effectively.

Rural

Key recommendations

The report has five key recommendations which the Government needs to take on board if it is to deal appropriately with the issues facing rural areas:

- 1 It urges the Government to give greater independence to councils and local residents in order to provide local level responses to the needs of rural communities, thus helping to ensure that the living and working balance is maintained. The role of the community led plan is considered crucial to this, identifying local needs.
- 2 That referendums requiring 90% community support for the construction of new small scale developments in rural areas be scrapped, given that this target is unrealistic and largely unachievable. Instead, the Coalition proposes that parish councils, aided and informed by community led planning, should initiate such developments within the existing planning system with a focus on meeting local needs.
- 3 Innovative solutions to the need for affordable housing should be developed through dialogue between local authorities and communities in a way which best meet the needs of residents and localities. This would be assisted by allowing local authorities to receive the money generated through the sale of council owned property, which they would then be free to invest in new schemes.
- 4 Government must assess the impact of public sector funding cuts on rural areas, both in terms of the services and the likely effects which such cuts will have, before the completion of the Comprehensive Spending Review. It proposes that communities should be allowed to receive some of the savings generated by public sector funding cuts, thus allowing the development of innovative local solutions such as community ownership of assets, community generated broadband, sustainable energy and community transport schemes.
- 5 Planning practices need to be reformed in order to provide communities with the opportunity to take the lead for achieving thriving and sustainable new neighbourhoods. This would involve working closely with planners to develop effective solutions to the needs of rural dwellers.

Coalition



The key findings and recommendations of the report identify the roles that could be played by individual organisations:

Communities

- Communities should develop community led plans in order to ensure that they have a clear and strong evidence base from which to inform decision makers and service providers. Decisions will be required on local priorities and taking responsibility for delivering against these.
- Town and parish councils should champion community led plans and represent key conduits through which the needs of the community may be presented to service providers.

Public sector organisations:

- Use small area data for decision making as this better reflects the need and nature of rural areas.
- All policies and delivery mechanisms need to be rural proofed in order to ensure that they do not negatively impact on rural areas or communities.

- Involve parish and town councils in decision making and information dissemination to ensure the communities are kept informed of developments and are provided with an opportunity to feed in their own knowledge.
- Adopt community planning as a key component for the delivery of the Big Society.
- Ensure that Local Enterprise Partnerships accurately reflect and address the needs of the rural economy and provide appropriate business support.
- Public sector providers should consider whether shared or multipurpose service outlets, outreach provision or mobile services will provide effective mechanisms for delivering into rural areas.
- Transport planning should take full account of the access issues associated with dispersed rural communities and innovative programmes for delivering community solutions at lower cost.

Key solutions

The solutions outlined by the Rural Coalition are summarised under six main headings:

- 1 Creating and maintaining sustainable rural communities
- 2 Meeting the affordable housing needs of rural communities
- 3 Building thriving rural communities
- 4 Delivering great local services
- 5 Flourishing market towns
- 6 Empowering communities

As yet, there has been no comprehensive Government response to the report. However, whatever occurs as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review published on 20 October, the issues which it addresses will remain of key importance to those living in rural areas for the foreseeable future. The Rural Challenge report has provided some of the blueprint for the change and has many individual recommendations that can help to ensure the future for living and working rural communities.

The County Rural Partnerships in Sussex have



each considered and have broadly endorsed the recommendations of the Rural Coalition report and are now looking in detail at local support and implementation of those recommendations.

The full report and a summary report are available on the AirS website at www.ruralsussex.org.uk



Advance warning... Local council elections May 2011



Above: Arun Local Democracy Week

Local Democracy Week took place from 11–16 October and marked the 'kick off' for a number of events in the six months leading to the elections on 5 May. Sussex Associations of Local Councils (SALC) and Action in rural Sussex (AirS) are working with district councils to raise the level of public awareness and encourage local people to stand for their parish or town council.

It may seem a long time away, but town and parish council elections are only held every four years and so 5 May 2011 represents an opportunity to reinvigorate those councils with new members and new interests. Between now and May 2011 a lot of decisions will be made about public sector funding and hopefully there will be much more detail about the Big Society theme of the new Government.

It is going to be an unprecedented time of change for local councils, but also one where there will be great opportunities to take up the new challenges being laid down by Government.

Parish and town councils are going to need the best talents from within their communities for this time of change and new policy ideas. AirS knows through

its own work with rural communities that there are many individuals who get involved with local initiatives and projects and who have much to offer in terms of energy, skills and ideas. These individuals need to be encouraged to stand for election to their local council and add to the pool of talent there already.

All too often local councils are accused of not having elected members, of being made up of mostly co-opted members. Every four years there is a chance to change this perception and try to ensure that really local democracy is alive and well in rural communities. There is often a high turnover of Councillors on parish councils as people step down or retire from the role, so there are nearly always opportunities for new faces on each parish council.

The elections are a real opportunity to encourage new people to get involved with the parish or town council and there is still plenty of time to have a local campaign of encouragement.

Remember every pound raised by your town or parish council through Council Tax is spent within your community for the benefit of its residents. Quite often this expenditure will be as a result of matters identified through the Village Action Plan, a community led activity in which you may already be involved.

Local councils are statutory bodies to whom Parliament has granted a huge range of powers;

why not become part of your local council and influence the way these powers are used for the direct benefit of your community?

Lastly, there is much talk about localism and the devolution of power and decision making to the local level. In most rural areas the parish or town council has been that local decision making body for over 100 years. Now is the time for local people to get more involved in their local council in order to ensure that it reflects the interests and priorities of all local people. The role as Parish or Town Councillor can be very rewarding and is likely to be centre stage in the community as the aspirations expressed by the Big Society principles are implemented over the next few years.

Thinking of becoming a local Councillor?

If you are interested in standing as a Parish Councillor you have time now to find out a bit more about the role before making a decision:

- Talk to your parish council Chairman or Clerk or existing Councillor to find out more about the role and whether there are likely to be any vacancies.
- Look at the *Become a Local Councillor: Make a difference!* resource pack on the SALC website at www.sussexalc.org.uk or your parish council should have a copy that you can borrow.
- Attend a parish council meeting as a member of the public to see how the council functions.
- Look at the Parish Plan and the council's own strategy to find out more about what might be happening in your parish in the next few years.
- Discuss your own passions and interests locally to see if there are others who would support you locally in a Parish or Town Councillor role.



Parish or Town Councillor role.



Sussex Apple Day



Locally grown apples, Sussex apple juice and rare Sussex apple varieties all featured strongly at Apple Day, organised by AirS and Brighton Permaculture Trust on 26 September in Stanmer Park near Brighton.

Children lent a hand all day long to make juice on a traditional press and played apple games while people of all ages ate apple cakes and puddings, tried the Apple Quiz, brought their apples to be identified by expert pomologists, toured the orchards at Stanmer and were entertained by local musicians of all ages.

Over 20 volunteers helped to run the event, including a number of AirS staff! Apple Day was also the place for people to find out more about the whole of the Local Fruit Futures project, which is enabling up to a 1000 people across Sussex to learn orchard skills and is ensuring the future of rare apple varieties through the planting of school and community orchards.

For more information see our website.



For more information contact Anne-Marie Bur on 01273 405445 or email Anne-Marie.Bur@ruralsussex.org.uk

Chichester Isolation Action Group Thank you and goodbye

To mark the end, due to the withdrawal of funding, of the highly successful and innovative Isolation Action Group (IAG) project managed by AirS for a number of years, two events were held on 29 September.



to the band of volunteers who have supported the project and its activities, including the Days Out, Gentle Walks and Community Allotment projects, in a variety of ways and without whose commitment we would have been unable to achieve all we did.

Over lunchtime, students from a special needs school entertained a number of older people at Dell Quay Education Centre. The morning had been spent shopping and baking with guests arriving at 1.30pm for delicious refreshments and a couple of hours of chatting with a lot of laughter thrown in!

Following that, Pat, Susie, Pip and staff from the Harbour Conservancy hosted a tea party to say 'a big thank you'



A number of the IAG's projects have been found new homes and AirS is working hard to secure further funding to be able to continue the inter-generational and heritage activities in the future.

For more information contact Pat Buesnel on 01273 405441 or email Pat.Buesnel@ruralsussex.org.uk



AirS is almost 80 years old!

Next year, Airs will be celebrating 80 years as an organisation. Until the mid 1990s it was known as Sussex Rural Community Council. As part of the celebration we are compiling a record of the story of AirS. This will include photographs, stories and publications from both those who have benefited from AirS' support and those who have worked with and for AirS. If you have any memories or material that could be included we would love to hear from you. **For further details please contact Claire Reynolds on 01273 407305 or at Claire.Reynolds@ruralsussex.org.uk**



West Sussex rural broadband – register now!

We are all aware that broadband provision is very poor in some parts of the two Counties. As part of a programme of achieving better broadband provision, West Sussex County Council has put a short questionnaire on its website for residents and businesses to complete. This will help the Council to understand the use of internet across the County.

In turn, this will help build the business case to put to BT Openreach and the internet service providers. The County Council is in open discussions with BT Openreach already and the Rural Partnership has been promoting the need for better broadband infrastructure to reach rural areas.

Given the potential benefits for many businesses, communities and individuals in the County, it would be helpful to get as many responses as possible from the widest possible cross section. The County Council are interested in the views from two key audiences: those without any broadband connection at all, and from small to medium size businesses, particularly in rural areas. Please spread the word about the questionnaire as this will help to build up a pattern of demand which in turn could help to persuade providers to improve services.

To fill out the questionnaire, please go to www.westsussex.gov.uk/broadband

Plumpton: new walking guides

Temperatures soared as about 50 walkers gathered at Plumpton Railway Station to mark the launch of the Village's footpath guides. The 16 walks in the leaflets have been designed to highlight Plumpton as a 'gateway to the South Downs'; many are circular and include refreshment and pub breaks along the way. The leaflets have been produced by the Plumpton Village Action Plan Group with input from many local organisations and groups – a real community effort.



Forthcoming events

West Sussex Rural Forum

Wednesday 10 November 9.15am–1.30pm

Brinsbury Campus near Pulborough to discuss 'Growing the Local Produce Economy – production, distribution and markets. A review and discussion of development needs.'

East Sussex Rural Forum

Monday 6 December 9.15am–1.30pm

Uckfield Civic Centre to discuss 'Closing the Gap' – an examination of disadvantage in both social, community and economic development in rural areas in order to develop a vision for rural areas that can then become part of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership priorities for 2011.

For more information on both of these, visit the AirS website under 'Events', or contact Claire Reynolds on 01273 405305.

STOP PRESS:

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

As we go to press, plans for the launch of the Kent, East Sussex and Essex Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) at the beginning of November are well advanced. AirS will be working with their counterparts in both Kent and Essex to ensure that rural areas are well represented.

In West Sussex, AirS and the Rural Partnership are also involved in decisions over the next few months about rural representation on the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership which involves Rural West Sussex, The Gatwick Diamond, Coastal West Sussex, Brighton and Hove City and the London Borough of Croydon.

These new partnerships of councils and businesses will replace the Regional Development Agencies across England and according to the Government "will wish to provide the strategic leadership in their areas to set out local economic priorities." LEPs are described as 'central' to the Government's aim for an economy 'rebalanced' towards the private sector.

Next edition...

The next *Action* will come out in February and will be a summary of services provided by Action in rural Sussex.

If you know of anyone or any organisation who might wish to receive this newsletter please contact the editor:

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